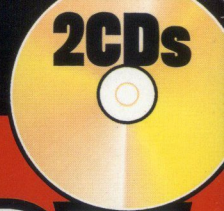


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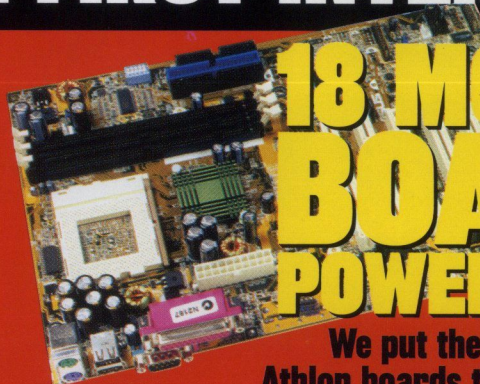
FIRST SCREENSHOTS! FIRST INTERVIEW!

8 PAGE PREVIEW!



BLACK & WHITE

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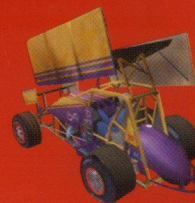
SHOWDOWN!

DURON 850 VS CELERON 800

Which is the best low-cost chip?

REVIEWED!

**STARFLEET COMMAND II
BLAIR WITCH PROJECTS
BATTLE OF BRITAIN
SCARS OF VELIOUS
DTR: SPRINT CARS
SIM COASTER**



PREVIEWED!

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HOSTILE WATERS
COMMANDOS 2
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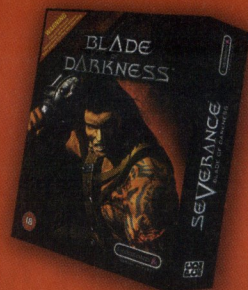
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Prepare yourself for something truly amazing. You are one of the first people in the world to see the next great firstperson action game...



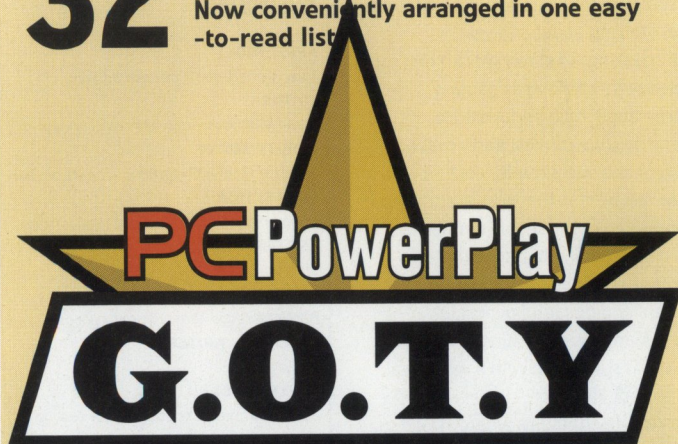
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© CD PowerPlay #59

All of this month's Gaming Goodness in one handy jewel case!

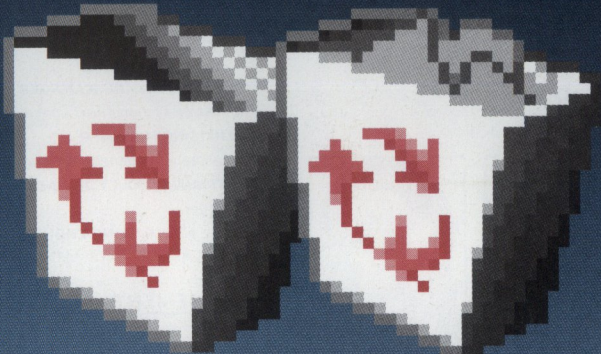
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MONKEY MUTINY



TONY

As if you need to ask. Sheeesh!

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Pro Scooter 2

What usually does well in this sort of situation is an analogy of some sort, a story, something heartfelt, real, hyperbolic, emblematic, alive with human emotion. I shall imagine that I am a motivational speaker, you be the audience of mindless saps and I shall attempt to beat up some unreasonable enthusiasm. What say?

We have reached a crossroads, a juncture, a by-pass, a zebra crossing; from which we, the gaming community, nay confederacy, cannot wholly escape, indeed would do well to consider carefully and in some detail. What is it to be a player of PC games at this time, in our day and age? There are no social scientists probing gamers (snigger) to reach the innards of what makes us as individuals. A love of gadgets (ooh, its got lights...), a morbid fascination with minute detail, an inner desperation to succeed and be appreciated, a healthy mix of narcissism and masochism, a long corridor that leads to an empty room, a packet of cigarettes, cold comfort,

cold beer on a hot day, warm bodies on a cold day, sweet, sweet mangoes, cold bananas, tiramisu ice cream, water skiing, all you can eat for \$7.95, the cricket, something heartfelt, really anthemic, alive with humane motion, Berocca, bananas, mmmmmmm...

What was I talking about? Ah yes, motivational speaking. So surely we can rest easy in the knowledge that as long as gaming continues to be about high performance machinery and sex, we can rest easily that no matter how high the specs rise for each new game, we can still be sure that we are attractive.

To paraphrase an organiser of SummerNats:

"People are beginning to realise there's a definite connection between beautiful computers and beautiful people."

Man, this editorial sucks. Maybe I could start again with a whimsical slice-of-life script.

David: Hey Anthony, where in God's name is that Black & White feature?

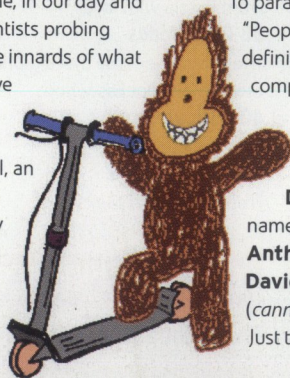
Anthony: Will you get the **** off my back.

David: That's what your mother said.

(canned laughter)

Just the ticket.

Tony the Reviewing Monkey



THE PC POWERPLAY CREW

Which Black & White creature would we choose to adopt?



DAVID WILDGOOSE

One that could fly, fly me away...

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Shinji the monk



ANTHONY FORDHAM

A mango, for I am sweet, pure and I taste of summer

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Moonshine Runners



HUGH NORTON-SMITH

A sulfur-crested, tawney beaked possum

WHAT I'M PLAYING

The field 1...



DANIEL STAINES

A Celestial Badger

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Deus Ex



HARRY MARAGOS

A well-hung donkey

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Unreal Tournament



CHANTAL BAIRLE

I am the walrus...

WHAT I'M PLAYING

The field 2...



JAMES COTTEE

The fruitiest creature of them all

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Fortran the barbarian



TIMOTHY C. BEST

A lion - I've got the mane to match

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Baldur's Gate 2



CHRISTIAN READ

A dangerously fluorescent bastard mango

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Call to Power 2



JOHN DEWHURST

A giant pussycat. Because I am a giant pussycat

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Mario Tennis



GARETH JONES

A dolphin - cos they have lots of casual sex every day

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Champ Man 00/01



BRETT ROBINSON

The Rampant Wildebeast(TM)

WHAT I'M PLAYING

Dead or Alive 2

PC PowerPlay

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Medal of Honor Allied Assault

RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN NOW HAS A GENUINE RIVAL

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

2015

PUBLISHER

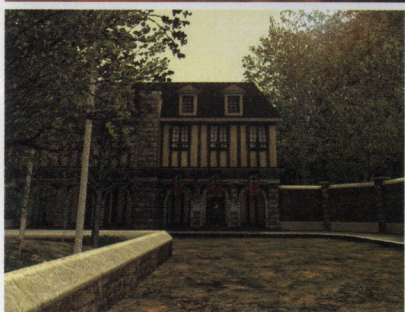
Electronic Arts

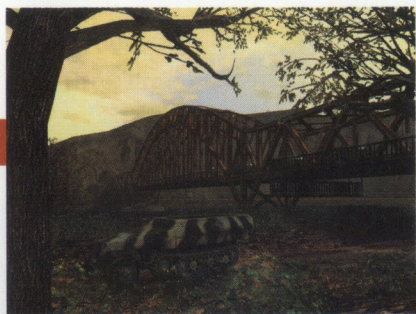
DUE

October 2001

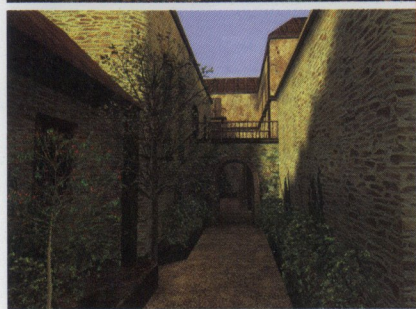
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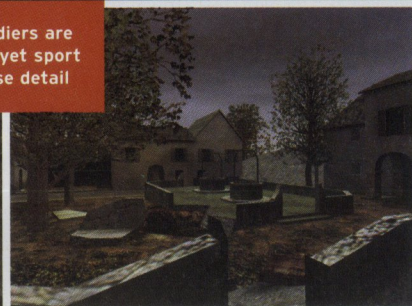




Crates galore! A sure sign of a quality shooter



The soldiers are stylised yet sport immense detail



Later levels will mirror the 'duelling snipers' scene in which the allied soldiers were pinned down by a crack Nazi sniper ensconced in the shell of a clock tower. Another will recreate the infamous final battle where the remaining members of the Allied detachment thwarted a concerted assault by a German armoured division.

Though frequently shunned by the relatively elitist PC gaming community, Sony's PlayStation boasts a number of exemplary titles that are more than worthy of a cross-platform translation.

Case in point: the phenomenal Medal of Honor series developed by Dreamworks Interactive. The original Medal of Honor and its sequel, Medal of Honor: Underground, set new gameplay and immersion benchmarks that, many would argue, remain unsurpassed by any firstperson shooter released since.

Saving Private Ryan

Set in the European and North African theatres of WWII, both titles delivered an experience quite unlike any other, in which the player was tasked with the covert infiltration and destruction of targets deemed strategically

vital to the success of the Nazi war machine. For Medal of Honor devotees, EA's announcement that the next instalment in the series will make its debut on PC is long overdue, and cause for much celebration.

Like its predecessors, Medal of Honor: Allied Assault will draw much of its inspiration from Saving Private Ryan, Steven Spielberg's epic masterpiece that brought the harsh realities of war uncomfortably close to home. Developer 2015 aims to preserve the historical accuracy of the game, while at the same time paying homage to some of the film's most memorable scenes. One of the game's earliest missions will mirror the film's heart-wrenching opening sequence at Omaha Beach, and will allow the player to take an active role in the offensive.

Two finger salute

From its Oklahoma base, 2015 has been toiling steadily on Allied Assault for the past twelve months. Working in concert with EA Los Angeles (formerly known as Dreamworks Interactive), 2015 is stretching id's Quake 3 engine to its limits. The end result will be a game in which primary and secondary weapons, and even individual fingers, will be visible on character models, and close examination of trees will reveal a profusion of branches covered by hundreds of three-dimensional leaves. Such detail leaves (no pun intended) little doubt in our mind that this will prove to be one of the most realistic looking games yet.

With a release date of October, those clamouring for more Medal of Honor goodness don't have long to wait.

Brett Robinson

WHY MEDAL OF HONOR: ALLIED ASSAULT DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...



■ Predecessors rank as some of the best FPSs of all time

■ It'll give Return to Castle Wolfenstein a run for its money

■ Won't be just your average, brainless shoot-em-up

■ Offers cooperative and adversarial multiplayer action

Hostile Waters

IN THE TRADITION OF CARRIER COMMAND

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Rage

PUBLISHER

Interplay

DUE

April

URL

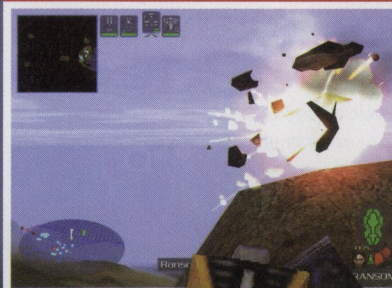
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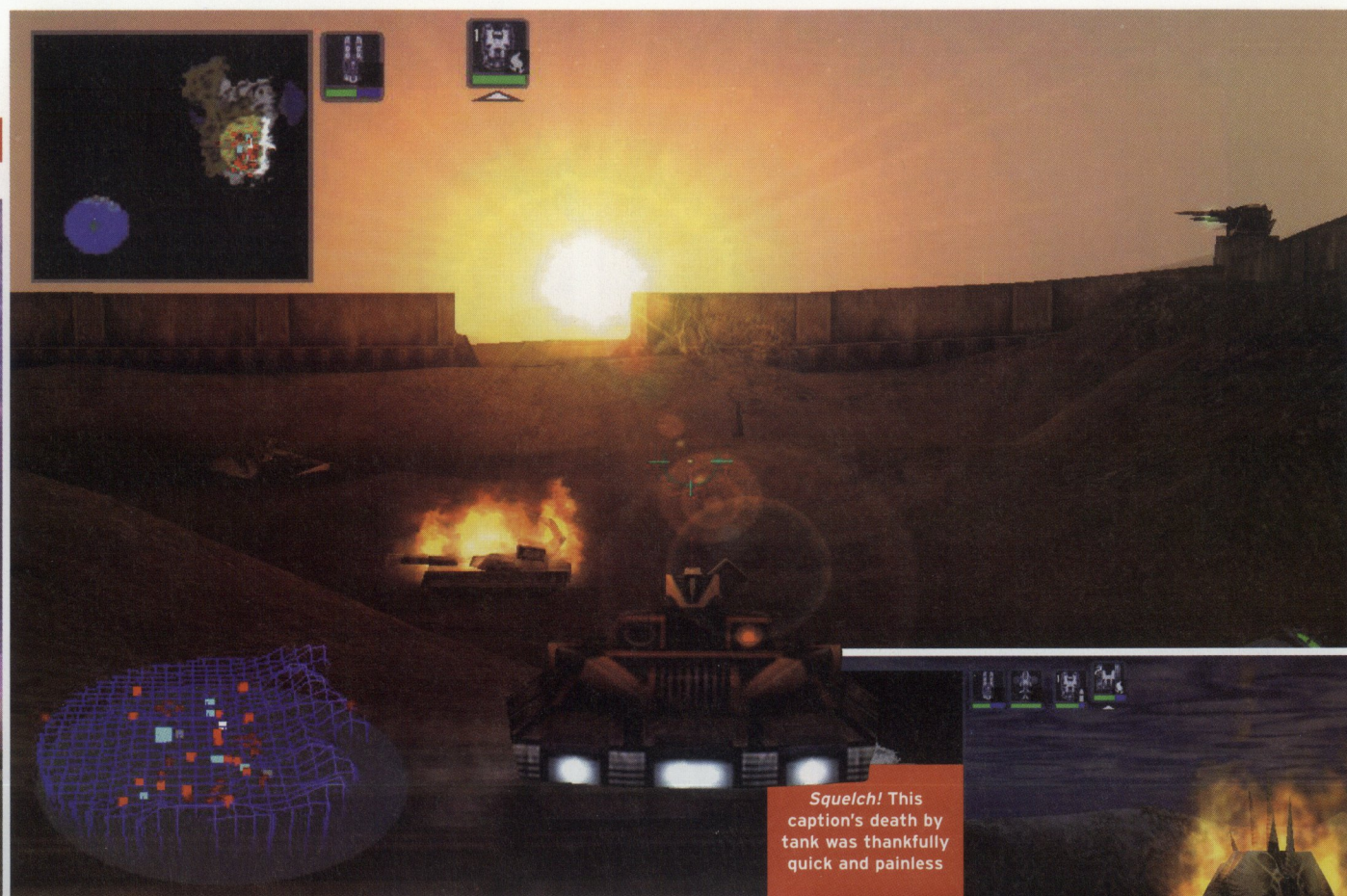


Pilot a whole fleet of unique vehicles - and shoot stuff



The carnage is excessive and yet somehow always eminently satisfying





Squelch! This caption's death by tank was thankfully quick and painless

of bad people get together and form big evil guy collectives that generally have one purpose mind: the perpetuation of war for profit. It's happened in the past, it happens now and it will happen in the future.

According to Rage Software's upcoming 3D strategy title *Hostile Waters: Antaeus Rising*, in 2032 a collective of war mongering evil guys called the Old World Cabal will attempt to push a then peaceful world into battle once again - for profit. With the help of a whole host of land and sea-based vehicles that, incidentally, are controlled by the souls of dead soldiers, the player will have to stop them. The whole plot's too interesting and intricate to go into here, so let's get to the meaty stuff: combat.

Recycled genius

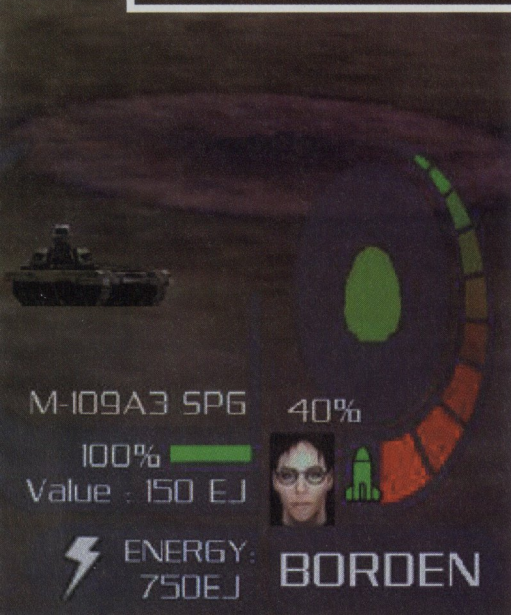
Combat in *Hostile Waters* will essentially be a vehicular squad-based RTS affair revolving around specific mission goals which are almost nearly always offensive. Progression revolves around the player destroying a plethora of fortified islands owned by the Cabal using vehicles such as hovercraft, mobile sentry towers, tanks and seacraft. Interestingly, when in battle players can become the pilot a chosen craft and fight it out face-to-face with the enemy in glorious realtime 3D.



However, it is in the area of resource management where *Rage* has excelled. The resource system in *Hostile Waters* appears to be a true stroke of genius. Operating on a 'debris' system, the game allows players, with the help of a harvester, to gather scrap metal from previous battles and use it to build new units - an idea that, when coupled with *Hostile Waters*'s unique upgrade and unit management system, will make for a very, very solid strategy jaunt indeed. Recycling: it's the way of the future, you know.

As is clearly apparent from the screens on this page, *Hostile Waters* is certainly no eye-sore. Sadly, we've got a while to wait for it yet, but judging from what we've seen it looks as if our patience will be entirely worth it.

Daniel Staines



War - what's it good for? Absolutely nothing, unless, of course, you happen to be evil. If you're evil then war is good for a whole lot of things. Like profit, for instance. War is very profitable if you happen to be a bad person. In fact, it's so profitable that entire cabals

WHY HOSTILE WATERS DEMANDS A SECOND LOOK...

■ An interesting and original story - in a strategy game!

■ Resource management system is a stroke of genius

■ You can pilot your own units from the cockpit

■ And just look at it, it's bloody gorgeous!

FEATURING

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DVDA

Spotlight

NEWS FROM ALL QUARTERS OF THE GLOBE

Civilization III Unveiled

STILL SPELT WITH A Z, STILL WITH SID MEIER'S NAME ON IT

Firaxis has announced the development of Sid Meier's Civilization III at www.firaxis.com/civ3. The site gives few details, but provides a brief look at three of the units that will appear in the game, and gives a general overview of the Civilization game philosophy.

"Sid's original Civilization was not intended to be a game about war," says Firaxis designer Jeff Briggs, "but it was most often played as a conquer-the-world game." To this end, he adds, Civ3 will have a more complex combat system to make it more realistic. In previous Civs, technologically superior combat units such as tanks would often find themselves blocked and defeated by primitive units such as phalanxes, simply because the phalanx was holding a pass or some other advantageous terrain. Now, mobility and ranged weaponry will also determine the outcome of battles.

DINOSAUR EXTINGUISHED

In news related to the Civilization III announcement, Sid Meier has posted on his Dinosaur website that he will not be continuing development of the game.

Meier attributes his decision to other new projects at Firaxis and to the Civilization III project. He also feels finding a working game style for Dinosaur was proving too difficult. "There was a DinoCraft style of game, in realtime," he says, "and there was a DinoPlanet game, turn-based. There was a game where you were one dino. Then there was a game where you were an entire dino tribe. Finally there was a much more abstract game with a heavy online component. We never found that magic combination of ingredient that makes it really fun. And if it ain't fun, it don't get done."

Meier hinted that Dinosaur would be continued some time in the indefinite future, but otherwise exhorted fans to remain excited by other, unannounced Firaxis projects and the upcoming Civilization III.



A fine army, if ever there was

Civilization 3 will also feature hero characters, each capable of leading a civilisation's forces to victory.

"They can pass their personal experiences onto future generations of soldiers," says Briggs, "and these towering figures can single-handedly alter the course of history." Briggs is also keen to stress that Civ3 is much more than a simple facelift for a tried and tested game. He says this latest iteration will combine all that was great about Civ and Civ2, and will also incorporate new technology from Sid Meier's Alpha Centauri (A Brian Reynolds Game).

He is also confident that Civilization III will be "the best looking turn-based strategy game ever," although he was quick to add, "That's just part and parcel of providing the ultimate Civilization experience."

Unfortunately, at this stage Firaxis has released little information on the game, although they promise the Civ3 site will be updated frequently with new units, screenshots and information. Stay tuned for an in-depth preview in an upcoming issue of PCPP.

Ratings Ramp Up

WARNING: DVD GAMES MAY CONTAIN PORN

The age-old debate about game censorship and content is heating up again, with the government set to consider the inclusion of an R18+ classification for computer games.

For the first time since 1996, the classification system for computer games is up for review and the effect that the evolution of computer game related technology seems to have changed the playing field a little.

Chief censor of the Office Of Film And Literature Classification (OFLC), Des Clark, has noted that, "The question is whether there is room for an R classification on computer games because with convergent digital media there are potentially computer games on R-rated DVDs and therefore this points to the need for a converged, merged set of guidelines which deal with this new media". Quite. We would surely agree, if we knew what on earth he is talking about.

Unsurprisingly, concerned 'watchdog' groups have sprung into action, saying that the R18+ games would fall into the hands of children. Said Jane Roberts, VP of Young Media Australia, "The video outlet shops where you can hire these games don't

always follow OFLC guidelines. Children will access this and it's not always easy for parents to supervise it." That the same scenario would thus already exist for R-rated videos did not really seem to concern Ms Roberts.

The OFLC has presented draft guidelines for the classification system

review to Daryl Williams, and will eventually be put before the state Attorneys-General, then released for public comment. We will definitely keep you posted on further contributions to the debate, as well as any future statements from 'watchdog' groups.

Soldier of Fortune would be a candidate for a new R rating



B-17 PORN

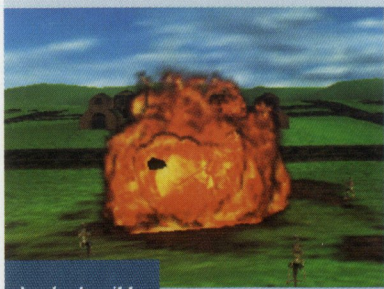
Along with accurate WWII Bomber sim, B-17 Flying Fortress also contains links to several Internet porn sites hidden within certain game files. Players innocently hacking files with a Hex editor were surprised and disturbed to discover the links, sparking an internal investigation at B-17 developers Wayward Studios. Unfortunately, B-17 publisher Rage Software, declined to comment.

By George!

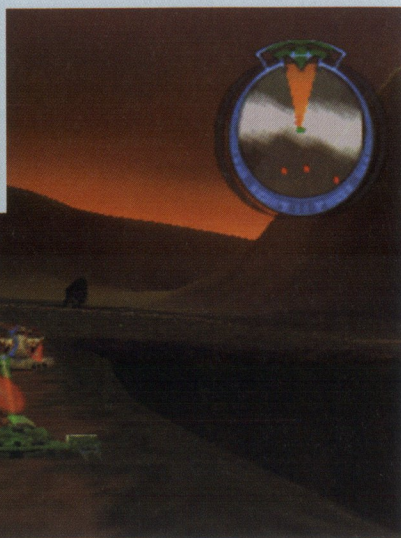
BATTLE FOR NABOO HEADED FOR YOU

In what appears to be an attempt to appease disgruntled, Obi Wan-less PC gamers, LucasArts intends to release the upcoming action flight sim, Battle for Naboo, on the PC.

The game is based on the Phantom Menace universe and will feature fifteen levels of blasting droids, AT-AT Walkers and other assorted Star Wars paraphernalia into space dust. Scheduled in for a March release, expect to see Battle for Naboo on your PC screen sometime this year. Maybe.



Looks terribly exciting, doesn't it?



EQ Banned

EBAY CRACKS DOWN ON ITEM FARMERS

In a tremendous blow to the ever growing posse of online roleplaying profiteers, internet auction site eBay purged an estimated 4,500 EverQuest character and treasure items off its selling lists recently after continual complaint from Verant Interactive and its parent company, Sony.

A spokesman for eBay says the site was responding to valid objection from Sony/Verant claiming that the sale of EverQuest characters or items is an infringement on the company's intellectual property provisions. Interestingly, Sony/Verant themselves were only acting upon the large amount of complaints received from EverQuest gamers protesting the ever growing number of 'item farmers' in the game - players who play only to collect items for online sale. Such players, say the EverQuesters, discount the fun involved in questing and, due to their desire to get quality items, increase a propensity among players for camping near monster hotspots.

High-level EverQuest characters and items, such as the Clock of Flames, sold for up to US\$1,000 and, if what eBay and Sony have to say is true, quite a profitable - if illegal - business has been put to ruin with their action. Neither eBay nor Sony/Verant will be taking punitive action against those previously or currently involved in EverQuest 'merchandise' sales.



WINNERS!

PCPP#55

MTV SKATEB'DING

■ T. Dance
Connewarre VIC
■ S. Lightfoot
Port Lincoln SA
■ A. Tinsley
Kyabram VIC
■ S. Fell
Moonee Ponds VIC
■ R. Croft
Heidelberg VIC

CULTURES

1ST PRIZE

■ H. Ballard
Alexander Hts WA

RUNNERS UP

■ A. Tinsley
Kyabram VIC
■ A. Burton
Albany WA
■ J. McDonald
Waverley NSW
■ M. Connolly
Blue Bay NSW
■ J. George
Eastwood NSW

PCPP#56

THE KATY COMP

■ G. Coker
East Ringwood VIC

GRAND PRIX 3

■ C. Kopp
Morayfield QLD
■ D. Fero Fodor
Pascoe Vale VIC
■ S. Macerak Jnr
Brooklyn VIC
■ T. Harkin
Woodrising NSW
■ A. Sinn
Red Cliffs VIC

GAME OF

THE MONTH

■ P. Harrison
Newport NSW

PCPP#57

GAME OF

THE MONTH

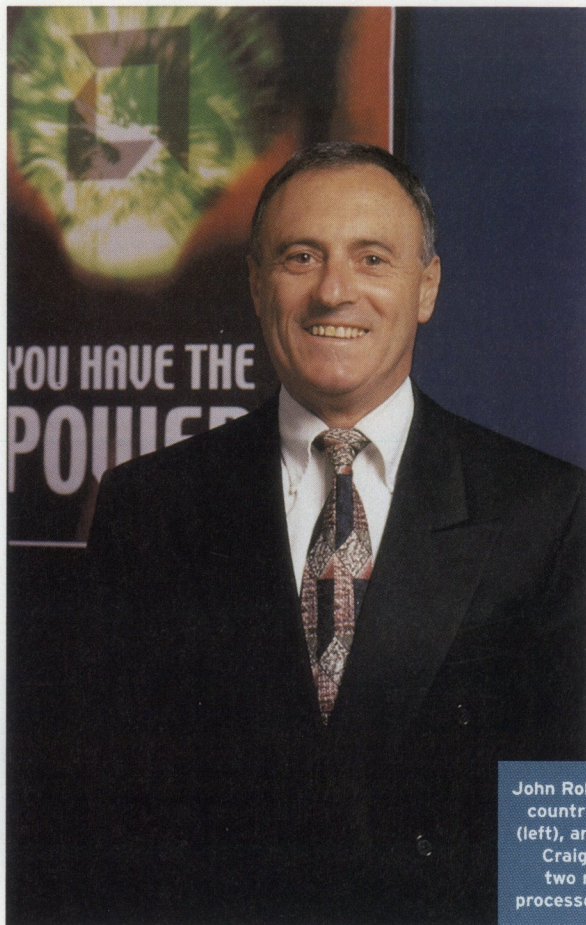
■ T. John
East Keilor VIC

JACK-IN

A device that allows players to improve 'accuracy and response' of a computer game through mind control has been developed in the US. The evocatively named Attention Trainer allows concentrating players to improve the size and speed of a small paddle in a pong-like game. A price tag of \$899 limits the appeal of the device to mad scientists and the gadget-obsessed.

AMD set to dominate

MOBILE DURON IN NEC NOTEBOOK, P4 RELEASED PREMATURELY, SAYS AMD CHIEF



John Robinson, AMD country manager (left), and Intel CEO Craig Barrett: two men, two processors, one war

LOW-POWERED INTEL CHIP

In response to AMD's Mobile Duron, Intel has announced the release of ultra-low-power processors for notebook PCs. The new Mobile Pentium III and Celeron chips draw less than half a watt of power and operate under one volt.

Intel believes the processors will dramatically improve notebook battery life while maintaining performance, while also reducing the size of portable PCs. The Mobile PIII 500Mhz will be included in notebooks weighing less than two kilos and measuring only 3cm in height.

However, the processor will only run at 300Mhz in Ultra Low Power mode, using Intel's SpeedStep technology. With AMD now joining Intel in the mobile processor race, users will continue to see improved battery life and lighter notebooks in the coming months.



AMD Dominance

When asked about the recent trend for gamers to prefer AMD Athlon and Duron processors over Intel chips, Robinson says the answer is simple. "If you buy AMD, you will get more bang for your buck." He says the success of the Athlon over the Pentium III in

gaming machines is that the Athlon has far more potential as a processor. With a central core designed to eventually run at 2GHz, AMD does not need to release a new processor core to remain competitive. This will allow users to keep older motherboards for longer and save on upgrading.

In the ever-present 'numbers game' of processor competition, the Pentium 4 now offers the highest clock speed, at 1.5GHz. Robinson responds by saying the Athlon 1.2GHz still outperforms the P4, particularly on tests that reflect everyday CPU usage. Recent introductions of newer technology also make Athlon a more attractive choice, he says.

"The latest Athlon boards support Double Data Rate RAM, which I believe will be supported by the industry. Intel's RAMBUS technology is too much of a stand-alone product to be really popular."

Double Data Rate RAM improves memory speed from 133 to 266Mhz, and uses the same manufacturing process as Standard Data Rate or SDR RAM, keeping memory costs low and dramatically improving performance.

Robinson believes the release of the P4 has been a desperate move by Intel. "I think the P4 has been released prematurely in order to compete with the higher-clocked Athlon processors. They have been forced to bring out a new core, while seventh generation Athlon technology still has plenty of room to move."

With a number of powerful processors due for release during 2001, including the Mobile Duron, AMD continues to improve its position and offer gamers a worthy alternative to the no longer ubiquitous Intel 8086 architecture.

AMD's position as a serious rival to Intel was further cemented this month with the release of the Mobile Duron Processor. Aimed at reducing the overall cost of notebook PCs and improving system performance and battery life, the Mobile Duron will compete directly with Intel's Mobile Celeron range of processors.

The new chip will debut at 700MHz in NEC's LaVie U notebook. The processor uses AMD's unique PowerNow technology, a system that actively monitors CPU usage and adjusts clock speed accordingly.

Australian Country Manager for AMD, John Robinson, says PowerNow is a far more dynamic power management system than Intel's SpeedStep technology. "If you're using say a word processor, the mobile Duron will lower its clock-speed to save power," he says, "If you then open a game or processor-intensive application, the clock-speed will automatically increase."

Robinson believes the Mobile Duron is superior to mobile Celeron and PentiumIII chip, as it is a true seventh generation processor and offers more headroom for higher clock speeds and other future improvements. He says the new chip "offers 38% better battery life than notebooks running AMD's previous K6 mobile processor."

He is confident the Mobile Duron will "raise notebook value in terms of battery life and performance." The chip will be available in Australia toward the end of Q1 2001.

CORRECTION

In PCPP#58, the review of the ASUS A7M266 motherboard stated the price of this board was \$349rrp. Unfortunately, the correct price of this board is \$415. PC PowerPlay regrets this error, and apologises for any inconvenience or disappointment caused.

Server

YOUR CONNECTION TO THE INTERNET

TELSTRA UNVEILS STRANGE CABLE AUP

Telstra's cable service has recently introduced a revamped AUP, and a 'freedom plan monitor' with which users can monitor their usage. With the reputation of the monolithic telco already firmly established, many users were expecting a policy that was even more stringent than Optus@Home's, but in a surprise move the policy is far more forgiving.

Using a traffic light system of green, amber and red lights, users can monitor usage compared to the rest of the Telstra cable network on a daily basis. Users who download too much data on a given day (as with O@H, no physical limit is given or indicated) will receive a 'red light'. Two red lights in one week will result in a warning notice being emailed out to the user. If the user gets another two red lights during a following week then a 'final warning notice' is sent out. A third set of two red lights within a three month period results in a one month suspension from the service, though at the end of the suspension period the user is reinstated with a 'clean record'.

Already a number of flaws in the plan have become apparent, as many users have pointed out. Most obviously, it seems that one 'red light' per week is acceptable, and would seem to encourage users to do the majority of their major downloads on one

day. Also, once two red lights have occurred during one week it doesn't seem to matter what the user does for the rest of that week, as they have already breached the limit and will receive a warning letter regardless, so they seem to be effectively able to download as much as they want for that week. With a daily limit, the acceptable download figure reportedly also wildly fluctuates depending on overall usage for that day, so users really have little idea as to what is acceptable on any given day.

Telstra is encouraging user feedback on the issue, and are at present 'fine tuning' the AUP monitor.

JINX.NET FOUNDERS WAKE UP, SMELL COFFEE

In a move that should come as no surprise to anyone with a modicum of sense, Jinx.net general manager Joel Grant has said that the company won't be going ahead with plans to launch a free broadband internet service to consumers paid for entirely by banner ad revenue. It was estimated that revenue of around \$12 million per year would be necessary for the business to be viable. In a message on the company's high class web page (www.jinx.com.au) Grant stated, "At this stage there just aren't enough advertising dollars in Australia to support the service that we have proposed". Well, der.

Win!



EVERQUEST DELUXE EDITION

In a recent debacle in the US courts, a couple sued each other over the rights to their respective, mutually developed EverQuest characters during a messy divorce process. Insanity, certainly, but insanity with a reason: EverQuest is a cracking good game. So good, in fact, that UbiSoft has decided to share it by giving THREE copies of the Deluxe pack (including the Kunark and Velious addons) to YOU!

The guy sitting there saying 'Me?! All you have to do, friend, is send us a short polemic on why you think EverQuest is worth much more than everything including food, sleep and a failing marriage. Go on, disregard the ethical implications of the comp and get to it!

Evercrack @ PC PowerPlay

78 Renwick St
Redfern 2016

ISP Watch

iPrimus ADSL

IPRIMUS JOINS THE BROADBAND BANDWAGON WITH AN ADSL SERVICE PRICED TO SCARE THE BIG BOYS

Hoorah! Broadband is finally beginning to become commonplace - you know this is so when ISPs other than Telstra and Optus start offering services. iPrimus, already firmly established as a bloody good ISP, has been one of the first non-Telstra/Optus bigwigs to begin an ADSL service, and it's a damn good one, too.

First up, there are no data limits for the Jetstream service (there is a cheaper data limited deal, but we won't even bother with that). No traffic lights, no comparative netstats. It's advertised as 'unlimited' and apart from the standard caveat that if a user "represent[s] an unusually large burden on... the iPrimus network, iPrimus may terminate or suspend this Agreement", download as much as you like.

Jetstream Plan*	Preselection [^] Per Month	No Preselection [^] Per Month	MB Allowance ^{***}	Speed [†]	E-mail Addresses [#]	Static IP ⁺ ?	Cost / MB
256/64	\$69	\$85	300Mb	256K/64K	Up to 4	N	18¢
256/64	\$74	\$90	Unlimited	256K/64K	Up to 4	N	N/A
1.5/256	\$110	\$126	500Mb	1.5M/256K	Up to 7	N	18¢
1.5/256	\$115	\$131	Unlimited	1.5M/256K	Up to 7	N	N/A

[†] Speeds are represented in downstream/upstream e.g. 256/64 represents 256Kbps downstream/ 64 kbps upstream.

[#] Each additional e-mail address in excess of this allocation is charged at \$10 per user per month.

⁺ A permanent IP address is used where no DHCP is used.

[^] Preselection refers to iPrimus being pre-selected for long distance and local calls on the telephone number used for ADSL.

^{*} Features & pricing are subject to change. iPrimus Standard Agreement for Internet Services apply.

^{***} If your activities (in iPrimus' judgment) unreasonably restrict, inhibit, or degrade any other Customer's use of the Services, or represent an unusually large burden on iPrimus' staff or the iPrimus network, iPrimus may terminate or suspend this Agreement.

Installation (All Plans)

Contract Length	Installation Fee
12 Month	\$256
18 Month	\$187
HDSL Setup	\$300

As we go to print, iPrimus is connecting users in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide with further areas 'coming soon'. Though iPrimus uses its own network for data, Telstra's DSLAMs are used in exchanges and so are dependant upon when Telstra makes the exchanges operational. At present all data is routed through Sydney, so users from other centres may experience a slight increase in ping times (around 10-20ms). Perhaps the only real downside to the Jetstream service is that while there is the usual installation and setup fee, once the contract period is over if a user changes ISPs they must return the ADSL modem and supplied Ethernet card to iPrimus, whereas Optus@Home and Telstra cable/ADSL customers effectively purchase the equipment as part of the installation and monthly charges. Still, not a major concern really.

PCPP

SPEED ★★★★★

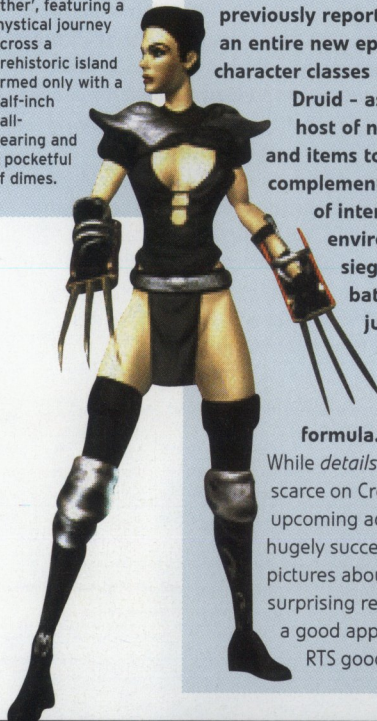
COST ★★★★★

UNLIMITED TIME ✓ DATA ✓

LOCAL GAME SERVERS ✓

PINBALL

In unexpected news, Epic has announced development of a pinball game using the Unreal Tournament engine. Adventure Pinball: Forgotten Island will employ balls, flippers, gutters and dinosaurs in a 3D environment to create a pinball game 'unlike any other', featuring a mystical journey across a prehistoric island armed only with a half-inch ball-bearing and a pocketful of dimes.



Extra!

ADD-ONS, EXPANSIONS, UPDATES

In a recent press release bragging of the phenomenal *Diablo II* sales, Blizzard has finally confirmed a title for the upcoming expansion pack for said cash-cow RPG hit. *Diablo II: Lord of Destruction*, as previously reported by us, includes an entire new episode and two new character classes - Assassin and Druid - as well as a whole host of new monsters to slay and items to collect. This will be complemented by the addition of interactive environments such as siege towers and battlements and may just add an entire new dynamic to an often tiresome formula. It is due in June.

While details are exceptionally scarce on Creative Assembly's upcoming add-on for their hugely successful *Shogun*, pictures abound the net with surprising regularity and serve as a good appetiser for any meaty RTS goodness we should be

Shogun: The Mongol Invasion



receiving in the future. From what we know, *Shogun: Total War - The Mongol Invasion* will allow gamers to play as the said Mongol invaders, hence allowing for a big 'ol bag of new units and tactics to be toyed around with. But anyway, look at the snaps available in the meantime. Aren't they pretty? And just a quick note to finish on Black Isle's upcoming

expansion for *Baldur's Gate II*. Details are under a big lockdown after Interplay France erroneously released info about it when it shouldn't have. For now, all we know is that it's called *Throne of Baal* and is looking to be a full game sized expansion that will please BG zealots the world over. We'll keep you posted as we learn more.

Win!



A THRUSTMASTER WHEEL!

If there's one thing that Thrustmaster are good at doing, it's either providing jokes for dirty minded individuals about thrusting and being the master thereof or making quality PC peripherals, particularly in the racing-wheel department.

Happily, we've managed to tie the two together by giving away this brand spanking new, super wow Formula Pro Digital steering-wheel courtesy of, you guessed it, Thrustmaster. It's got a solid-steel shaft, it's got lotsa buttons and you want to win it. You want to win it by sending in your best 'Thrustmaster' jokes on the back of an envelope which we will then look and, hopefully, laugh at. If you manage to tie-in the 'solid steel shaft' bit, then all the better, now get scawling you little deviants!

The Katy Comp MKII @ PC PowerPlay

78 Renwick St
Redfern 2016

Whistling for XP

FIRST THE XBOX, NOW THE WINDOWS XPERIENCE AS MICROSOFT KNUCKLES DOWN ON 'PIRATES'

After months of speculation among fans, Microsoft has finally revealed that the next version of its enormously popular operating system will be called Windows XP.

The XP stands for Xperience, because, as chairman and chief software architect of Microsoft William Gates III says, "This new generation of Windows XP and Office XP will enable customers to communicate and collaborate more effectively, be more creative and productive, and have more fun with technology."

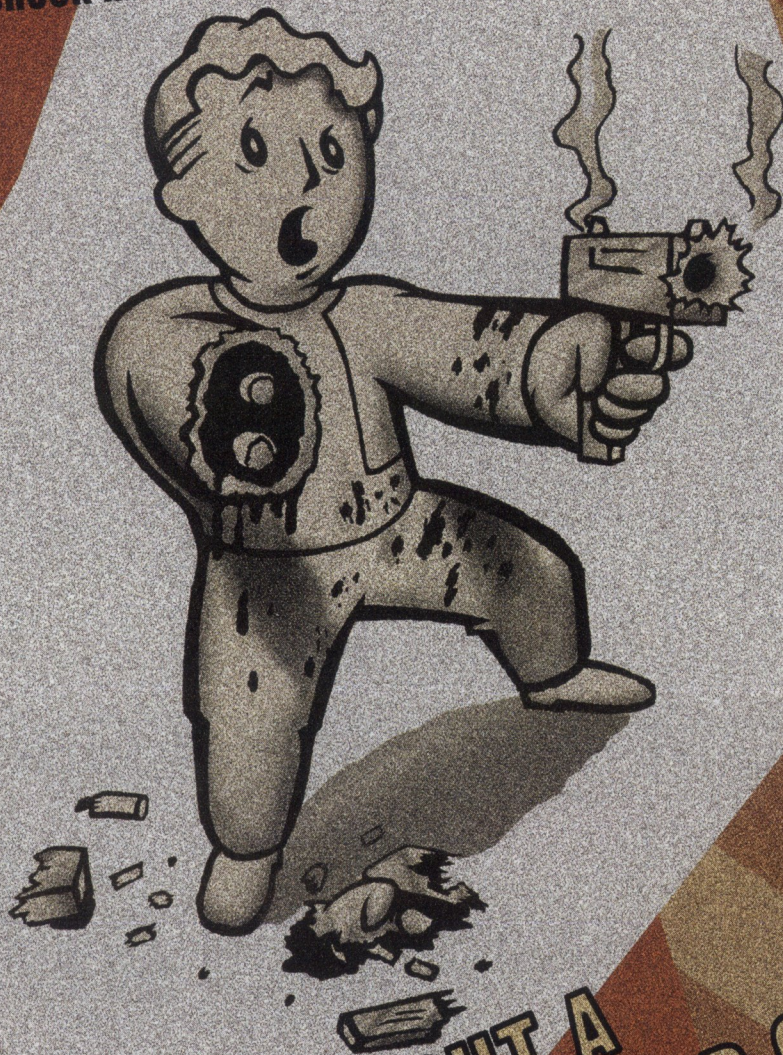
Windows XP brings Microsoft closer to a realisation of its master plan to create .NET connected devices, where eventually everyone will be using the one version of MS Word, connected via an XML architecture. Microsoft says .NET technology will 'free' users from disconnected individual devices, and move digital society toward a glorious, homogenised whole. Also during the Windows XP

announcement, Microsoft revealed new anti-software piracy measures with the Product Activation system.

"Consumers sometimes unknowingly violate their license agreement by sharing software with others," said Allen Nieman, technical product manager for Microsoft's licensing technology group. "Through education efforts and the use of technology solutions like Product Activation, we're working to make sure that customers who choose Microsoft software products acquire genuine software and are eligible for technical support and product upgrades."

Basically, if a consumer buys Windows XP, they will have only 30 days to ring Microsoft and give all their personal details before the product stops working. This new measure will curb the massive software piracy problem costing 'Australia' \$260 million each year, caused by home users installing Word 2000 on both their desktop system and their laptop, robbing Microsoft of \$395.95.

A NUCLEAR ATTACK ON THE USA BY 100 NUCLEAR BOMBS
WOULD KILL 20% OF THE POPULATION THROUGH BLAST HEAT,
GRAND SHOCK AND RADIATION... WHAT WILL YOU DO?



YOU CAN'T FIGHT A
NUCLEAR BLAST HEAD ON...

*Be prepared
Get tactical*



HYGIENE



FITNE



PRECAUTI



SURVIVA



PC
CD

Fallout
Tactics

www.interplay.com/falloutbos

Mod Life

SPOONMAN'S ROUNDUP OF ALL THE LATEST MOD NEWS

FIREARMS

For Half-Life

Developer Firearms

URL www.firearmsmod.com

Release Current 2.4

Firearms is quite an old mod, but it's had quite a few new revisions lately which deem it worthy of note. Firearms is similar to a lot of teamplay mods in many ways, yet there are quite a few differences which make it worth playing. The first difference is class definition. Instead of choosing a class you're allocated a number of points to distribute over certain attributes (strength, speed etc). As you go along and kill more people you go up levels; as you continue to go up you gain extra skills which can aid you in your path of destruction. One thing to watch out for is weight and fatigue, the heavier your weapons are, the more tired you get and the slower you'll go. Firearms is really a mod of balance, a series of trade offs to find the best character for you. It's also fantastic fun.



GRIDIRON

For Quake 3: Arena

Developer Q3GI

URL www.planetquake.com/gridiron

Release Current 2.01

Gridiron for Quake 3 is absolutely fantastic. The basic premise is this: two teams one field, you have 45 seconds to get the ball over the line before it's their go. They could tackle you, but why bother tackling someone when you give them a nasty rocket-sized surprise? The similarities with actual gridiron go only as far as having a field, a ball and an end zone and the fact you have to get the ball into the end zone. After that, this mod is complete mayhem and loads of fun. You get six points for scoring as well as the ability to kick field goals. The most amusing part is you actually get a bonus point if you can rocket jump over the goal posts.



IN DEFENCE OF AUSTRALIA 1942

For Combat Flight Simulator 2

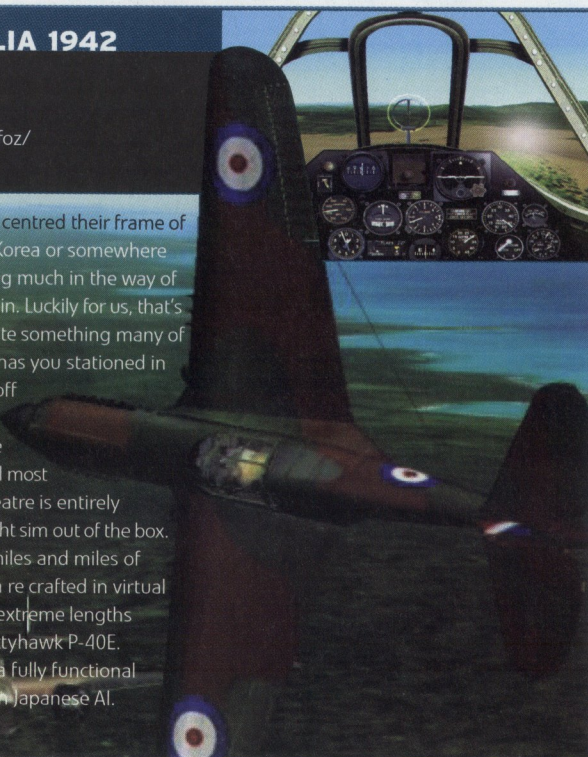
Developer Jorge Alsina and Joe Amodea

URL www.simflight.com/specials/cfs2-defoz/

Release Available Now

Traditionally, combat flight sim games have centred their frame of reference around the Middle East, or North Korea or somewhere "interesting" like that. Australia, since nothing much in the way of wars happens here, rarely, if ever gets a look in. Luckily for us, that's where Jorge and Joe have stepped in to create something many of us will have only dreamed about. This mod has you stationed in Port Moresby (Papua New Guinea) fighting off the Japanese hordes on their way to a probable invasion of Australia. If you fail, the future for Australia looks grim, but success will most likely see the war ended in Australia. The theatre is entirely compelling and worthy of inclusion in any flight sim out of the box.

As far as features go, obviously there's miles and miles of Papuan and Australian terrain that has been re-crafted in virtual glory. However, Joe and Jorge have gone to extreme lengths and lovingly recreated a whole plane, the Kittyhawk P-40E. Also included is some wonderful texturing, a fully functional Virtual Cockpit and most importantly, spot on Japanese AI. You'd be mad not to pick this one up.



SPOONMAN'S LAN DIARY

After nine editions of the LAN Diary finally we've reached Perth. Send your western LAN info to spoonman@next.com.au

FRAGAHOLICS ANONYMOUS

Location Gordon (Sydney) NSW

Dates Monthly

Players 24

Price \$12

URL www.frago.org

Frago is only small, but is an action packed and quality fun LAN. There are plenty of tournaments with prizes and for your 12 dollars you even get unlimited drinks. You have to bring your own food, but a bulk order from Pizza Hut is made around 1pm so it shouldn't be too expensive. You do have to bring all other snacks yourselves, just like most other parties.

GAMES DEN

Location East Perth WA

Dates Monthly

Players Varies

Price Varies

URL www.gamesden.com.au

Gamesden is truly an innovative LAN group. They have a rather large array of big name sponsors and a variety of different LANs that will always keep you interested. For example, just recently they held the Quake master's LAN, where players took part in Quake World, Quake 2 and Q3A Tournaments to see who could stand the test of time. Along with LANs Gamesden also runs a "Gaming Cafe" which is always open if you want to bring your PC in and plug it in with five friends and go hammer and tong. A truly inspirational idea.

IV LAN II

Location Newcastle NSW

Dates Easter Holidays (3 days)

Players 100+

Price \$20

URL cgs.wox.org

Following the immense success of the first IV LAN comes the second generation in the Easter holidays. Put on by the Newcastle University Union and Computer Gaming Society. IV LAN runs for three days and is a chance for all of the Newcastle gaming fraternity to show up and have some fun all in the one room. At only \$20 for three whole days, you can't go wrong.

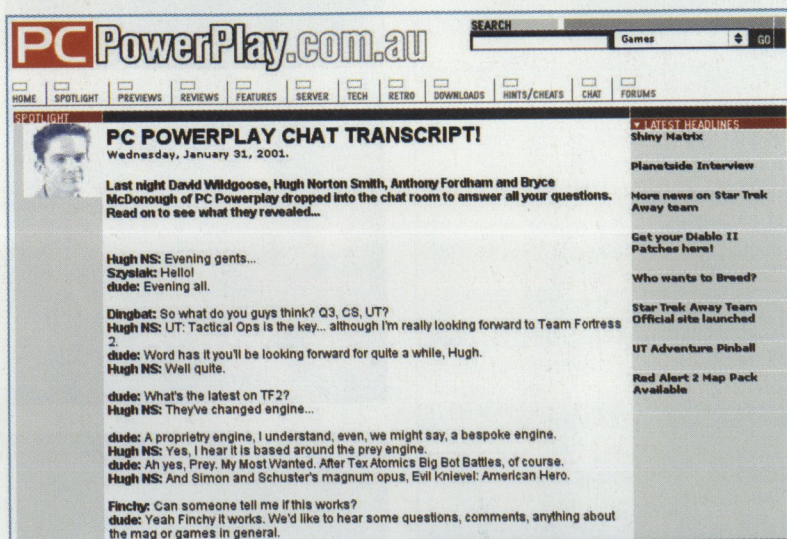
For submissions, email spoonman@next.com.au

Confidential

PLEASE SIGN THE NDA BEFORE READING THIS COLUMN

An interesting tid-bit of tasty speculative goodness has recently flitted our way courtesy of a one Mr Rob Fermier, former Looking Glass employee and current Lead Programmer for Age of Empires creators, Ensemble Studios. In a recently posted developer diary on Ensemble's official site, Mr Fermier boringly details how incredibly fun it is to work for his new taskmasters and - here's the juicy part - deliberately drops a few hints in regards to Ensemble's current project, a strictly under-wraps title codenamed RTS 3.

As you know, anything that gets codenamed must be good, so we, along with every other imaginative rumour-monger in the gaming press, are assuming that he's talking about the latest sequel in the previously mentioned, immensely popular Age of Empires line. Fermier didn't say this, we admit, but hey - what else could he be talking about? What OTHER RTS could Ensemble be developing that would have a '3' in its title? That's right: none. So get excited now, because according to Mr Fermier, development of this (we're hoping) gaming juggernaut is well under way and hopefully will be finished by the end of this year. Yay!



PC PowerPlay.com.au

SEARCH [] Games [] GO

HOME SPOTLIGHT PREVIOUS REVIEWS FEATURES SERVER TECH RETRO DOWNLOADS HINTS/CHEATS CHAT FORUMS

PC POWERPLAY CHAT TRANSCRIPT!
Wednesday, January 31, 2001.

Last night David Wildgoose, Hugh Norton Smith, Anthony Fordham and Bryce McDonough of PC Powerplay dropped into the chat room to answer all your questions. Read on to see what they revealed...

Hugh NS: Evening gents...
Systolic: Hello!
dude: Evening all.

Dingbat: So what do you guys think? Q3, CS, UT?
Hugh NS: UT: Tactical Ops is the key... although I'm really looking forward to Team Fortress 2.
dude: Word has it you'll be looking forward for quite a while, Hugh.
Hugh NS: Well quite.

dude: What's the latest on TF2?
Hugh NS: They've changed engine...

dude: A propriety engine, I understand, even, we might say, a bespoke engine.
Hugh NS: Yes, I hear it is based around the prey engine.
dude: Ah yes, Prey. My Most Wanted, After Tax Atomics Big Bot Battles, of course.
Hugh NS: And Simon and Schuster's magnum opus, Evil Knievel: American Hero.

Finchy: Can someone tell me if this works?
dude: Yeah Finchy it works. We'd like to hear some questions, comments, anything about the mag or games in general.

CHAT ROOM TOPICS

- Shiny Matrix
- Planetside Interview
- More news on Star Trek Away team
- Get your Diablo II Patches here!
- Who wants to Breed?
- Star Trek Away Team Official site launched
- UT Adventure Pinball
- Red Alert 2 Map Pack Available

Chat!

MEET THE PCPP CREW - VIRTUALLY

On January 30, we held the first ever web chat at www.pcpowerplay.com.au. It was great, obviously. David, Anthony, Hugh and Bryce were in attendance, each of us replying with wit, insight and patience (lots of patience) to a relentless barrage of your questions and comments. It was, as we probably said, great. Obviously.

Come and say hello to us on March 28 at www.pcpowerplay.com.au

Which is why we are going to be doing it all again. Mark it in your diaries: 7pm, Wednesday, March 28. Just swing by www.pcpowerplay.com.au and follow the link from the front page. In the meantime, spend the next couple of weeks thinking of the tough questions that you want to ask us. We will be ready for you. It will be great. Obviously.

CORRECTION

In the recent PC PowerPlay Hot Hardware Vol.4, a number of unfortunate errors were published regarding Guillemot products. We would like to use this opportunity to clarify that the Thrustmaster Firestorm Dualpower Gamepad and Thrustmaster Force Feedback Racing Wheel are in fact distributed through Guillemot.

A production error also resulted in the review text for the Guillemot MaxiSound Fortissimo being swapped with that of another product. For your information, the Fortissimo is a quality soundcard and received an Ultimate Hardware in PCPP#44. We apologise for these errors. For more information about Guillemot products, call 02 8303 1888.



DVDA

WITH JAMES COTTEE

SAMURAI X

19th century Japan, a land where the agrarian tranquility of the Tokugawa dynasty is finally giving way to nasty, impure, foreign influences. This lavishly animated OAV series chronicles the adventures of Kenshin, a master of swordplay and minor historical figure, who's relationship problems are only exacerbated by his job commitment to slicing undesirables into lifeless meaty chunks. The first disc of a series, this is anime at its best. It's a shame you only get two episodes per disc, though.

★★★★



HEAVY METAL 2000

After making his millions on Ninja Turtles merchandising, Kevin Eastman bought out the semi-pornographic comic book Heavy Metal to vent his literary fantasies about his amazonian trophy wife, Julie Strain. This movie atrocity involves prophecies, seedy space bars, and villains voiced by Michael Ironside and Billy Idol. The sloppy animation will grab your eye, and the horrible dialogue will crush your ears in a grip-like vice. Lots of extras, full 5.1 sound, and a disgrace to the memory of the first film.

★★



SIN

What do you get when you cross the worst excesses of rushed out firstperson shooters and Japanese tentacle pr0n? Why, Sin, of course, a low-end straight-to-video disc production which dominates the territory between high drama and the utterly ridiculous, the apex of entertainment for the adolescent. Join Colonel Blade on a schoolgirl violating, corporation hating adventure that will turn your brain into a sterile petrochemical mush. This is anime's answer to a question no one asked.

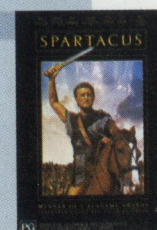
★



SPARTACUS

If you liked Gladiator, but felt it didn't have quite enough homo-eroticism, then this is the film for you! Kirk Douglas is Spartacus, the leader of a slave rebellion that threatened the might of Rome. There is little in the way of extras on this disc, but the film has been cleaned up and completely remastered in 5.1 sound, and even re-integrates five minutes of footage deemed too raunchy for the original 1960 release! One of Stanley Kubrick's less arty, but more entertaining romps.

★★★★



UNDERWORLD LIVE EVERYTHING, EVERYTHING

This is a handy-dandy collector's item for any Underworld fan; a 90 minute interactive concert-on-a-disc. If you really want you can watch the artists sweating and prancing about on stage, but a much better option exists in the form of video art from Tomato, the design group who did all the band's fruity album covers. A smattering of extras and options rounds out the apex of the Underworld experience. An ideal gift for any occasion. Get one for the home, one for the office.

★★★★





Coming soon

MARCH 2001

Black & White (Electronic Arts)
 Evil Dead (THQ)
 Fallout Tactics (Interplay)
 Fate of the Dragon (Ozisoft)
 Harpoon 4 (Ozisoft)
 Legends of Might & Magic (Jack of all Games)
 Myst 3: Exile (Ozisoft)
 Severance (Ozisoft)
 Silent Hunter II (Ozisoft)
 Startopia (Ozisoft)
 Star Trek: Away Team (Activision)
 Tribes 2 (Jack of all Games)

APRIL 2001

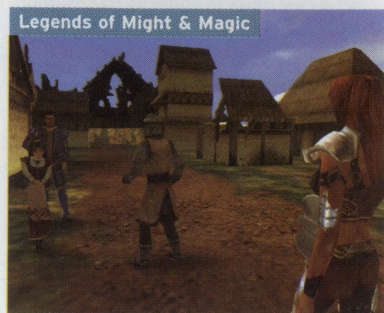
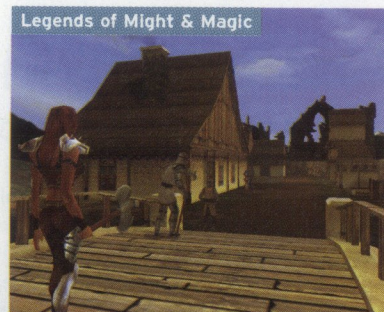
Anachronox (Ozisoft)
 Arcanum (Jack of all Games)
 Desperados (Ozisoft)
 Dragon Riders (Ubisoft)
 Gangsters 2 (Ozisoft)
 Hostile Waters (Interplay)
 I-War 2: Edge of Chaos (Ozisoft)
 Leadfoot (Jack of all Games)
 Operation Flashpoint (Ozisoft)
 Serious Sam (Jack of all Games)
 Summoner (THQ)
 Tropico (Jack of all Games)

MAY 2001

Alone in the Dark (Ozisoft)
 Commandos 2 (Ozisoft)
 Destroyer Command (Ozisoft)
 Evil Twin (Ubisoft)
 Mafia (Jack of all Games)
 MechCommander 2 (Microsoft)
 Project Eden (Ozisoft)
 Simsville (Electronic Arts)

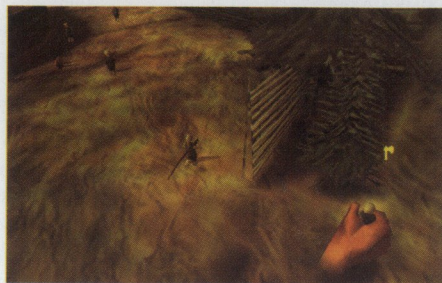
JUNE 2001

Baldur's Gate 2: Throne of Baal (Interplay)
 Conflict Zone (Ubisoft)
 Dungeon Siege (Microsoft)
 Pool of Radiance (Ozisoft)



Australia's most wanted

Woo-hoo! New games! Well, two of them, at least. It's a start. Straight in at No.9 (with a bullet) is SSI's roleplaying epic based on the 3rd Edition AD&D rules, Pool of Radiance. Another RPG to put in a good showing is Neverwinter Nights, likewise utilising AD&D, but in development at Bioware and Black Isle Studios. Notice has been duly taken of such performances and work has commenced on lengthy reports on the status of both titles for a future issue. We do listen, we really do. No such luck for the optimistic bunch who picked Thief 3. With Ion Storm still determining which game engine to license, it will be a while yet before any genuine news emerges about that game. When it does, of course, you can be assured we'll be there lurking in the shadows. At the top, Black &

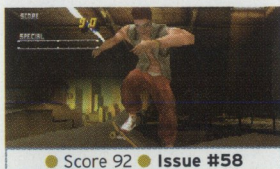


White once more defeated all comers, while Red Faction and Wolfenstein played musical chairs. This month's winner, Trevor White of Richmond, NSW, has scored a copy of Harpoon 4. Send your Top Five most wanted games to: wanted@pcpowerplay.com.au

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------|---|
| 1 | BLACK & WHITE | ◀ |
| 2 | Red Faction | ◀ |
| 3 | Return to Castle Wolfenstein | ◀ |
| 4 | Neverwinter Nights | ◀ |
| 5 | Commandos 2 | ◀ |
| 6 | Tribes 2 | ◀ |
| 7 | Warcraft 3 | ◀ |
| 8 | Emperor: Battle for Dune | ◀ |
| 9 | Pool of Radiance | ◀ |
| 10 | Thief 3 | ◀ |

Hall of fame

PCPP'S MOST RECENT GOLD AWARDED GAMES - BUY THEM ALL!



Tony Hawk Pro Skater 2

Activision

Much more than a console conversion or mere skateboarding sim, Tony Hawk 2's fluid gameplay mechanics are a breath of air on the PC.

Score 92 Issue #58



Zeus

Havas Interactive

An intuitive, accessible, yet beguilingly complex experience, Zeus takes the little blokes city building game one big step closer to god.

Score 91 Issue #58



Mechwarrior 4 Vengeance

Microsoft

After the disappointing third in the series, FASA Interactive has resurrected the mech sim with this fourth effort. Hardly original, but polished to perfection.

Score 91 Issue #57

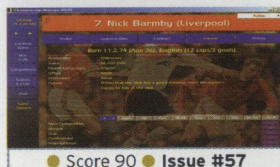


B-17 2

Hasbro

Despite the 11th hour loss of multiplayer, The Mighty Eighth offers such a compelling and varied singleplayer game that the option isn't even missed. Well, almost...

Score 90 Issue #57



Championship Manager 00/01

Ozisoft

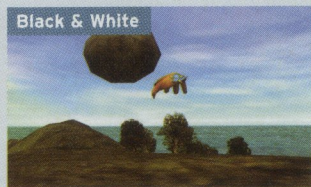
While admittedly of only niche appeal, this football management series is the pinnacle of the genre. CM00/01 is definitely the best yet.

Score 90 Issue #57

Our most wanted



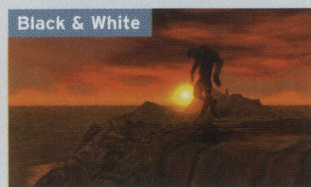
David: What if you don't believe in an interventionist God?



Hugh: It's the most important AI R&D in science today



Daniel: I've been touched by the hand of God



Anthony: I want to be a giant bunny

Games Chart

THE BEST SELLERS THIS MONTH

inform

The Official Australian
PC Games Chart

Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA

W/E January 21, 2001

Top 20 Best Selling Full Price PC Games

(>\$29.95 inc. GST)

Position	Game Title	Game Type
1	↑ The Sims	Strategy
2	↓ Barbie Detective	Adventure
3	↑ Sim City 3000 Unlimited	Strategy
4	↓ Age of Empires Collector's Ed	Strategy
5	↓ Cmmnd & Cnqr Red Alert 2	Strategy
6	↑ Sim Mania Pack	Strategy
7	↑ Cmmnd & Cnqr Tiberian Sun	Strategy
8	↓ Age of Empires 2	Strategy
9	↑ Sim Mania For Kids	Strategy
10	↓ Baldurs Gate 2	RPG
11	↓ Links LS 2001	Sports
12	↓ Combat Flight Sim 2.0	Simulator
13	★ Shogun: Total War	Strategy
14	★ Ashgan	Adventure
15	★ Race Mania Pack	Racing
16	↓ Diablo 2	RPG
17	★ Age of Empires	Strategy
18	↓ Grand Prix 3	Racing
19	↓ Delta Force 2	Adventure
20	★ Cricket 2000	Sports

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★ - New entry
↕ - Non mover
↑ - Up from last month
↓ - Down from last month

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INBOX

PLATINUM PC

The **LETTER OF THE MONTH** writer wins a game from Ozisoft's Platinum range of titles. Available in Platinum this month are Deathtrap Dungeon, Tomb Raider, Outcast, Imperium Galactica 2, TA: Kingdoms, Wheel of Time, and Le Mans 24 Hours.

Letters Topic: Is Black & White really going to be the best game ever?

Write to: PC PowerPlay Letters, 78 Renwick St, Redfern 2016 Email: letters@pcpowerplay.com.au



Q3TA

BYTE SIZE

Is there going to be an Age of Empires 3?

Daniel Foureur

Of course. Ensemble is working on a game codenamed RTS3. But which 'age' will it depict? We'd like to see the Age of Reason.

SLEEP DEPRIVED

Just a little correction for the records. I no longer find the System Shock 2 to be that shit scary. I do however find the Blood mission in Thief II to be pretty shit scary; upgraded to fucking scary when played at 1:00 am, sleep deprived, in pitch darkness, during a huge storm.

It gives a new meaning to being 'scared to go near to the computer' when you hear unexplainable tapping noises on the window and your hands won't stop shaking.

Matt Snow

Blood's not bad, but surely, surely, you mean Return to the Cathedral?

STROKE OF GENIUS

Just thought I would mention that the cover CD on the new issue changed my life! It made me dump Netscape for the first time ever in favour of Internet Explorer.

After installing Netscape 6 off the CD I was dumbfounded for about an hour at how stupid Netscape are. Making it impossible to launch the mail program without launching Netscape first, what a stroke of genius for all those lazy workers who don't have enough to do. But the real piece de resistance was the way in which it lets you import mail and addresses from Eudora and Outlook but not Netscape 4.7! Obviously Netscape didn't want to be burdened with all those annoyingly loyal users, who just get in the way after all.

Netscape 6 has to go down in the annals of computing as one of the most stupid things of all time, and it's butt

ugly to boot. Why do they think people want so many useless buttons and bollocks on the interface when the space left for the actual web pages is about the size of a big postage stamp?

George

WOOD KNOTT CORRECK

Hyllo. Eye deasided two rite 2 ewe gies aboyt yoor maghazeen.

I reed your maggieseen lazt mynth hand u sayd ewe wood knott correck spelleen misstakes? %^? Wire knot?

Craig Nicol, knew Zeelind

Christ, it's definitely going to be one of those months...

BYTE SIZE

Tony, you rock.

Go you good furry thing!

Phillip de la Rue

You gotta love the monkey.

BYTE SIZE

On collection of my gospel, I found a typo in the review of B-17 2. If it was not I want my 700 GB hard drive mailed out to me NOW!

Ross Williams

Congratulations for spotting last issue's deliberate mistake. No prizes for finding this month's.

SMART ENOUGH NOT

Team Arena is going to be an excellent expansion pack and shouldn't be criticised because the demo didn't include very many maps or models.

Who was the dumb one who put a guy who doesn't like id much because "they can't choose whether they are going to be a game developer, or a software kit developer"? What a dick!

Id make good games, because they do what they want to do, make it fun, and do a bloody good job at it. Everyone had a go at Q3A because it didn't have as many modes as UT. Q3A was designed to be the ultimate deathmatch experience, which it is. Like many Quakers, I believe it should have got a Platinum award, but I got over that.

But I can't get over some dickhead who was probably breast-fed till he was ten having a go at the demo of the game. I think you - the best gaming magazine in the world - would be smart enough not to put a guy who thinks unfavourably toward id to preview one of their games.

And to all who think that id are ripping off the public, because you can download these mods for free, here is my answer:

- Do these mods include professionally developed maps, including new styles of maps?
- Do they feature graphical improvements?
- Do they feature tons of new models?
- Are they made by id?

I could go on forever with these answers but I won't.

Haberdashery

You took
their flag.

Now they're
coming to
bury you
with it.

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Team-Based
Action

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LETTER OF THE MONTH

CHANGE OF MIND

I have spent the last year on System Shock 2 and Deus Ex. I am now really stuck in limbo with not a good game in sight. I am so disgusted with I'm Going In and Hitman that I thought that I would write and give you some feedback instead of trying to play the games.

I couldn't disagree with you more about games in which you can't advance with incremental saves. A feature of modern games is that it is IMPOSSIBLE to win them without cheating. Saving is ESSENTIAL to hold on to the advances that you have made. In Deus Ex I made OVER a thousand saves. This is pretty clever as the programmers didn't allow for more than a thousand. One of the magical ways in which Ultima Underworld was so unique is that the programmers were able to match the strength of the enemies with the player's increasing abilities so that there wasn't a necessity to cheat.

I hope that you will have a change of mind about the importance of saving games. I am SICK, SICK, SICK of the opening passage of I'm Going In.

My impression with Hitman is that they had to release a beta version to meet a deadline. I've never seen a game before where you aren't even told how to access the inventory (or 'holster' in a last minute change) You should be able to CONFIGURE the game to suit yourself. This is so easy to do that it should be mandatory. In Hitman they seem to have decided to use the LEAST possible number of keys. This is why they probably forgot to mention the G and T keys in the manual and the game itself.

In your interview with Deus Ex programmers they stressed their determination to let players wander around locations and interact with everything. I almost stopped playing the game when I was in Hong Kong, there was so much to see and do. All they want in Hitman 47 is for the player to be the link between bits of video that they have preprogrammed. In the Kowloon Restaurant mission all you can do is wander along the road for two block and fall down a drain. My guess is that Hitman 47 and I'm Going In will be a disaster for Eidos.

Roy Collins

With regard to IGI, our review did make it clear that it isn't a game for everyone. But once you train yourself to play it properly (ie. ultra-cautious and ever-vigilant) it really isn't all that hard.

Hitman does possess a few unfortunate undocumented features, and again isn't a game with wide appeal. Brett certainly stands by his review and the game's achievements in certain areas (particularly the physics) should not be underestimated. However, there are a few members of the team who would agree with your point about player freedom. Some of us would have liked a bit more to actually do...

To answer your questions: yes, yes, yes, no. Hope that you enjoyed Team Arena.

COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

I have seen mention of the game Majestic on numerous Australian game sites as well as your own magazine (PCPP #57). Am I the only one that realises that the game's reliance on real-world communication systems (phone, fax, etc.) means the game will most likely never see the light of day outside of the States?

F. Parker

Next issue will hopefully have an in-depth look at Majestic, and you can be sure that's one of the questions we will raise with EA.

PLAY THE PEOPLE

I would like to see home high-risk factors incorporated into online gaming. If climbing a ladder is enough for you, and winning points for every victory so you only play the people most likely to give you a good game, and you like it, that's fine.

But what I would like to see is a game that when you lose, not only do you not win points, but you also have the game uninstalled, your saves wiped clean and your computer rebooted all in a split second.

That would sure make people think twice before surrendering their game of Red Alert 2 to look for an easier mark.

Roy Govier

Perhaps a defeat could trigger spontaneous combustion of the

Chemtrail.com

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MADDEN 2004

EA GOLF

news email services

CNN.com

In some places, it seems like the flu season starts earlier and lasts longer every year. Occurrences of allergies and breathing disorders are at record levels in the United States. And over many populated regions, more and more people are noticing (and photographing) unusual contrails being laid down by passing aircraft. Some believe there may be a connection.

While contrails are a normal aspect of jet travel, they are supposed to dissipate like regular ice-vapors. Chemtrails, however, spread and begin to fall toward the earth over a longer period of time. These chemical compounds are being released in methodical fashion by our government — for reasons unknown to the citizenry.

Reports suggest small-scale chemtrail activity began in the mid-1960s (see [this link](#)), but the phenomenon appears to have intensified nationwide in the past year.

Picture of the Month
(Click on image for larger photo)

A slow-moving Air Force bomber leaves wide trails near Boulder City, NV (photo courtesy of Harvey Glenn)

Majestic

player as well? We like the sound of this. But is any developer out there keen to rise to the challenge?

JETFIGHTER IV

I just wanted to ask the general gaming public, what the hell is happening with our packaging? All of those who get annoyed with those stupid DVD plastic box-things for our games raise their hands - thought so. Games like Tomb Raider Chronicles, Hitman, Jetfighter IV and Heavy Metal FAKK II have arrived in this kind of packaging. I say that our proud, ridiculously sized boxes are what separate us from those console freaks! I am very, very proud of my mountain of cardboard and don't want it taken away! Take heed now developers!

Patrick

You're kidding, right?

CARDBOARD BOX

I just bought Project IGI, but what is with the new cases? What happened to the good old shiny cardboard box?

Brad Giles

Hmmm, you're not kidding...

As far as we are concerned, the new packaging is long overdue. From a consumer point of view, it definitely looks better - most game

BYTE SIZE

Has anyone noticed that if you were to whack a pair of thick 1950s style glasses on Christian Read that he has a spooky likeness to Gordan Freeman?

Bleech Dagger

And if you put a hood on Daniel, he would be the spitting image of Diablo.

BYTE SIZE

What can change the nature of a man?
Toby Ervin

It was always an interesting (and perhaps unanswerable) question, wasn't it? Is the answer experience? Love? Mortality? Immortality? Memory? Maybe even on a meta-level it's perhaps even playing Planescape: Torment? Time for another PCPP Roundtable, methinks.

artwork is embarrassingly ordinary, so the smaller the better, really - and takes up less space on the bookshelf. From a publisher point of view, the smaller size means titles take up less space on retail shelves, and therefore can remain on sale for a longer period of time. Theoretically, this should create a less 'hit-driven' industry, which is good news for everyone - developers, publishers, distributors and gamers alike. Though, ultimately, whether it succeeds in that aim is up to you...

UP ON THE TOILET

As I flipped through the pages of your insightful publication, I was mildly surprised to find that the regular Tony the Reviewing Monkey cartoon had gone AWOL. Sure, the monkey has been through some tough times lately, what with his unfortunate Christmas party shambles (that ended up on the toilet) and all. I am sure that Tony regrets some of the things he said and I think we all should move on.

Give Tony a fair go.

Sgroey

Tony lives!

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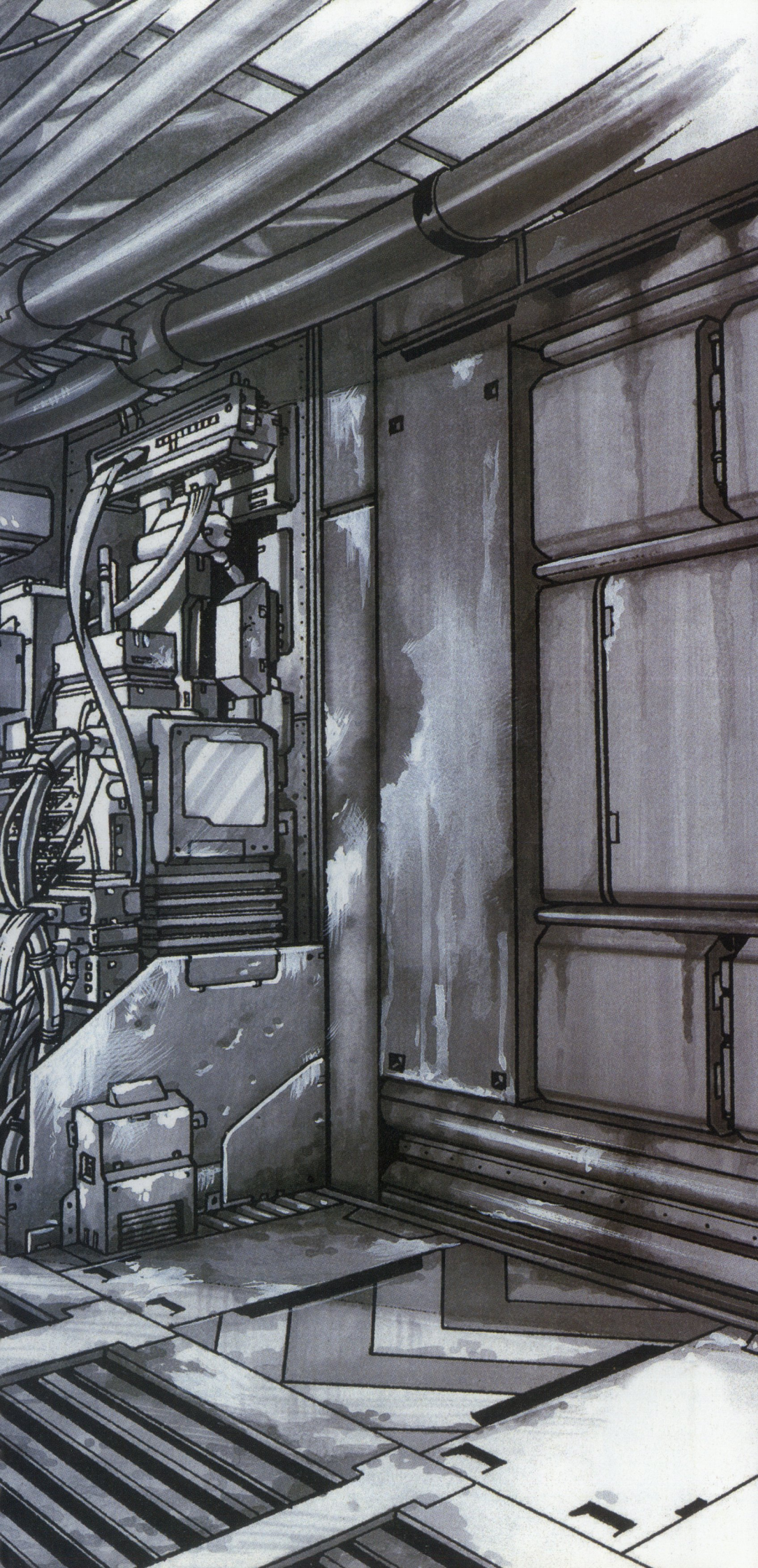
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DIGITAL



UNREAL 2

DAVID WILDGOOSE IS THERE TO WITNESS EPIC TAKE A
STEP CLOSER TO GENUINE VIRTUAL (UN)REALITY...



DEVELOPER Legend Entertainment

PUBLISHER Infogrames

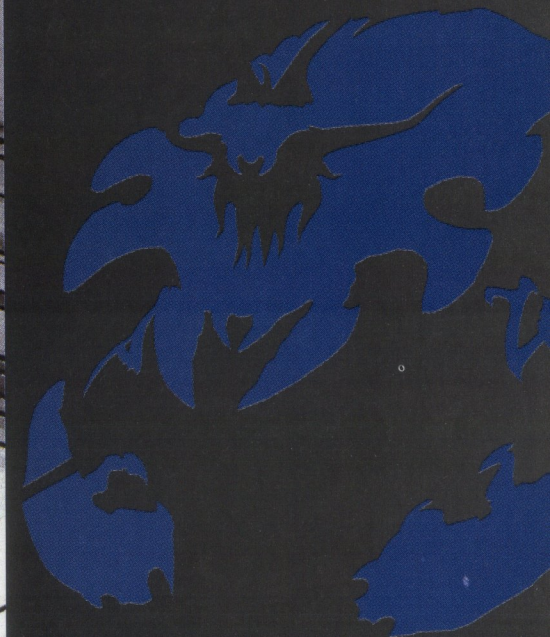
URL www.legendent.com

DUE Q2 2002

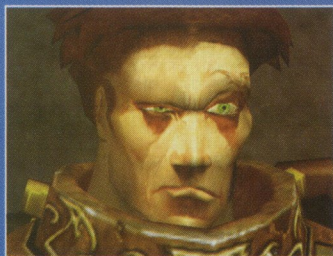
It's May 2000, downtown Los Angeles, and E3 is about to reveal one of its rare, annual surprises. A tiny booth squeezed into the centre of the massive Infogrames stand sits in stark contrast to the sprawling excess the French publisher has lavished elsewhere. Inside the booth, the screen solely and effortlessly responsible for holding the attention of those present is likewise incongruous against the mediocrity that lies only metres outside. Next to the screen, **Mark Rein**, Vice President of Epic Games (developer of *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament*), wants to introduce a bunch of scruffy game journos - including yours truly - to his new friend.

A tall, muscular chap, clad in rusted gold combat armour, enters the gothic castle with a noticeable swagger. His smooth, lithe animation comfortably deposits a collection of jaws on the floor. While the nameless polygonal fellow pauses in the flagstone corridor, Rein leans over the keyboard and types a few cryptic commands. Guided by the mouse, the camera zooms in on the character's face, his piercing green eyes exaggerated by a red-hued shock of hair and over-applied eye shadow. Then those green eyes look straight down the camera, addressing the enthralled audience directly. He grimaces, then winks. It's uncanny - disconcerting yet captivating at the same time.

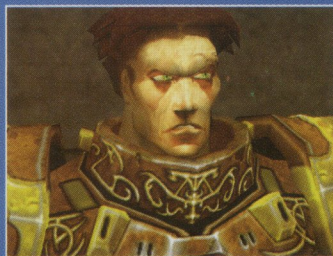
Clearly enjoying our rapt response, Rein punches in some more instructions and his onscreen companion begins a formidable series of exercises - jumps, spins, roundhouse kicks, jogging on the spot - as if it were some kind of virtual warm-up routine. And it's just a warm-up. Though already astounding, the real show has yet to begin. Believe it or not, this is not *Unreal 2*.



PERFORMANCE STUDIES



This series of images is from a demo to illustrate the new engine's power.



The first two close-ups show facial expression in stunning detail.



Meanwhile, the character models have ten times more polygons than before.



The resulting complex animation will lend each genuine character.

Now take a look at the opposite page. This is Unreal 2.

Here are the facts. It's being developed by Legend Entertainment, creator of 1999's *The Wheel of Time*. It's the sequel to both *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament*.

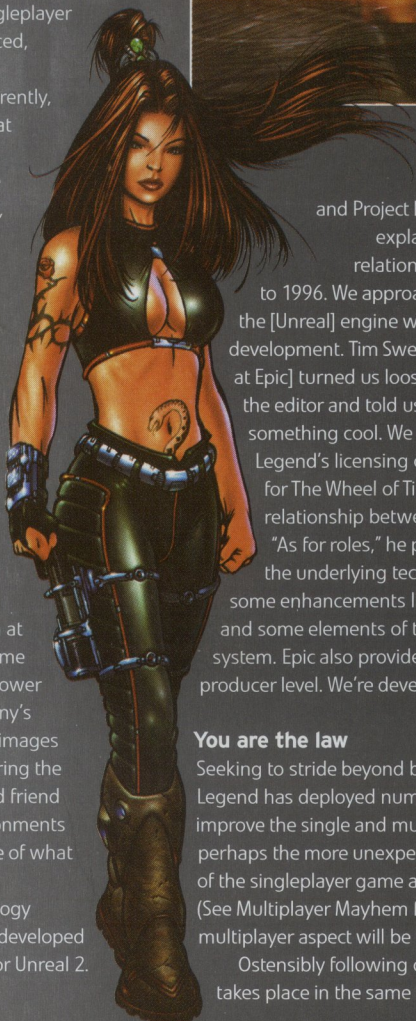
Given Epic's decision to design those two earlier games as primarily singleplayer and primarily multiplayer experiences respectively, it might come as a surprise to learn that Legend intends to combine and further both elements in the one game. (Especially so considering the gaming world's worst kept secret is the one about Epic working on a team-based follow-up to UT, likely to be titled *Unreal Warfare*.)

Nonetheless, the explicit and very ambitious aim of *Unreal 2* is to use 'advanced new technology to combine the magic of *Unreal*'s singleplayer game experience with the fast-paced, multiplayer mayhem of *Unreal Tournament*. The end result, apparently, will be a next generation game that combines the best of both worlds.

Painful marketing clichés aside ("Multiplayer mayhem"? *Groan...*), many would have been forgiven for thinking that Legend has overstretched itself. The guys responsible for the merely moderately successful *Wheel of Time* attempting to surpass *Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament*? Surely, you can't be serious...

Foundation work

In development for over a year now, the *real* *Unreal 2* has been kept tightly under wraps, secreted far from the public eye. The demonstration given by Mark Rein at last year's E3 show was not the game itself but instead a display of the power of the latest iteration of his company's acclaimed *Unreal* technology. The images and movies you will have seen during the past six months of our spiky haired friend and the large-scale outdoor environments also shown at E3 are but a glimpse of what *Unreal 2* might be like. Legend Entertainment is using the technology developed - and continuing to be developed - by Epic as the mere foundation for *Unreal 2*. And it's only going to get better.



Mike Verdu, Studio Head at Legend and Project Director on *Unreal 2*, explains: "Legend's relationship with Epic goes back to 1996. We approached them about using the [Unreal] engine when it was early in development. Tim Sweeney [Lead Programmer at Epic] turned us loose with an early build of the editor and told us to come back with something cool. We did. That interaction led to Legend's licensing of the Unreal technology for *The Wheel of Time* and a continuing relationship between the two of us.

"As for roles," he proceeds, "Epic is building the underlying technology. We are making some enhancements like the particle system and some elements of the skeletal animation system. Epic also provides oversight at the producer level. We're developing all the content."

You are the law

Seeking to stride beyond both *Unreal* and UT, Legend has deployed numerous strategies to improve the single and multiplayer experiences. As perhaps the more unexpected, the bold directions of the singleplayer game are worth exploring first. (See *Multiplayer Mayhem* for details on how the multiplayer aspect will be handled.)

Ostensibly following on from *Unreal*, the sequel takes place in the same fictional universe.

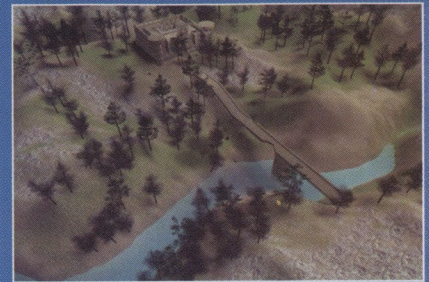
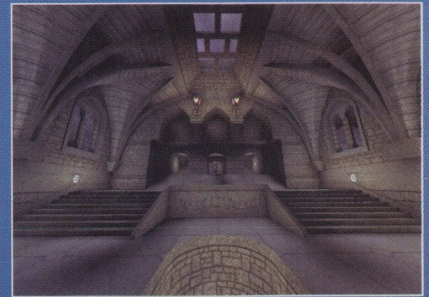
However, the main character is different and the player will not revisit locations from the first game. In fact, the role of the player character is diametrically opposed to that in *Unreal*; there you were a certified criminal, here you're a representative of the law. Not only that, but the scope of the singleplayer game is vastly greater, incorporating a strong narrative and considerable character interaction.

In *Unreal 2*, the player steps into the role of a Terran Colonial Authority Frontier Marshal, a civil servant responsible for the safety and security of colonists and civilians in a remote sector of space in the early stages of colonisation. The starship *Atlantis* - a former military craft retrofitted for government service - serves as a base of operations throughout the game. From it, the player patrols the assigned colony sector in the company of a support crew of three: Navigation Officer, Engineer and Intelligence Officer.

"You are the 24th century equivalent of a sheriff in the old west," says Verdu. "Things are quiet until the sector erupts in a violent series of battles between five alien races, multiple mercenary armies, and military shock troops. The source of the conflict is a set of ancient artifacts discovered on seven of the planets in the sector. You are caught in the middle of the fighting and must juggle your responsibility to protect your charges, prevent the artifacts from falling into the wrong hands, and solve the mystery of the origin and power of the strange alien objects."

Verdu is quick to indicate that this is no space combat sim - the *Atlantis* is just a starting point and

ENGINEERING SCIENCE



The two main screenshots accompanying this feature perhaps reveal more about the capability of the new Unreal engine than any list of graphical features ever could.

Nonetheless, Mike Verdu feels it's worth emphasising the sheer scale of the environments Legend is able to generate.

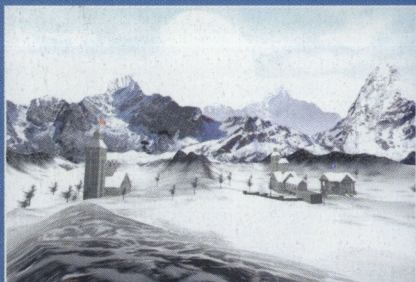
"We can now build stunning outdoor landscapes to go with the beautiful interior environments that have long been the strength of the Unreal engine," he says. "And we can build interior environments, characters, and in-game objects that have ten times more polygons than the old engine could handle."

"These key new technology features are due in part to new hardware brushes and improved mesh rendering, realistic outdoor scenery generated by a new large scale terrain system, and a particle system that allows us to realistically model fire, smoke, cloth, hair, weather effects, and breaking glass."

Indeed, the engine already supports texture sizes of 2048x2048, which is the largest any current nVidia videocard can handle. And with texture memory now managed courtesy of DirectX 8, the texture performance is also boosted.

The player's starship acts as a base of operations, but most of the action takes place on the surface of several planets like this one

MULTIPLAYER MAYHEM



Building on the success of Unreal Tournament, the multiplayer game modes of Unreal 2 will include the usual Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and Capture the Flag. A Last Man Standing mode will be introduced, where players are allowed but one life each, while the selection is completed with a new expanded multiplayer game that mixes action and strategy. The latter has the potential to be the real highlight of the game. Teams will fight for control of planet surfaces and alien artifacts using nanotechnology replicators to build ever more sophisticated weapons such as automated gun turrets, force fields, sensors, recon and repair robots, and more. Players will choose one of three player classes at the beginning of play - establishing a balance of speed, special abilities, armour, and firepower. All races, abilities, weapons, equipment, and tactics will have precedents in the singleplayer game - but the expanded multiplayer experience brings everything together.

The texture detail is extraordinary. Epic claims to have maxed out the largest texture size possible with the latest nVidia cards

SIXTY SECONDS OF SINGLEPLAYER



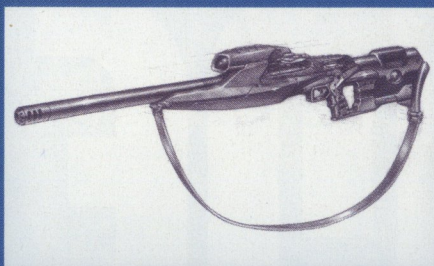
The dropship claws skyward on a plume of blinding white fire. You take a moment to look around the surface of Charon.

It is a bizarre and fantastic place, the landscape made up of twisted spires of rock and ice.

Volcanic vents spew fire, smoke, and steam into a twilight sky dominated by the awesome sight of the gas giant Janus. Your suit HUD flashes and chimes as Aida

contacts you from the orbiting Atlantis. "The outpost is about 500 meters behind you," she says. "Watch for bad guys."

You survey the remains of the outpost. Fires



are burning in the wreckage, while from the gaping holes in the walls thick metal bends outward like jagged flower petals. As you approach, you can hear the snap and hiss of energy weapons and the chatter of Terran combat assault rifles.

You enter through one of the craters in the side of the main structure. Once inside, you quickly assess the situation. A squad of Terran Mercenaries is engaged in a firefight with a group of aliens, armoured six-limbed creatures that can only be Izarians. Each group is spread out on one side of the outpost control centre, a large room filled with destroyed equipment and drifting smoke. Individual Merc soldiers and alien troops have taken cover and are firing furiously at each other. Neither group should be here; the

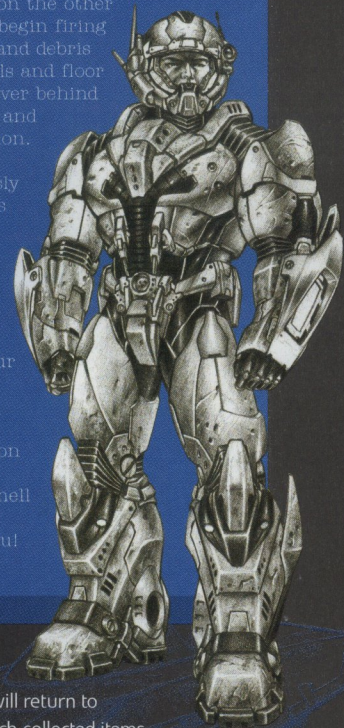
distress call that brought you here was from the original occupants of the outpost.

Both sides see you at once. One of the Izarians raises one of his limbs in an obvious salute. The Mercs, on the other hand, immediately begin firing at you, the sparks and debris flying from the walls and floor nearby. You take cover behind a smashed console, and make a quick decision. Even though the Terrans are obviously hostile, the Izarians are ultimately the worse threat.

You select universal comm on the suit HUD and yell "What Company?" into your mike.

The fire from the Mercs abates. "Screaming Eagles on assignment with TerraCor. Who the hell are you?"

"I'll stand with you! Cease fire!"



a form of transport between missions. The majority of the gameplay is resolutely earthbound, traversing locales as diverse as a ruined alien city and the molten surface of a volcanic planet, to a tropical rainforest and an alien industrial complex. Though, of course, there will also be encounters aboard enemy spacecraft.

Speak your mind

Thirteen missions will frame the singleplayer game, comprised of twenty-five levels each woven together by the narrative thread. As tradition dictates, cutscenes carrying detailed briefings precede the missions. However, in a nod to the achievements of Half-Life, System Shock 2 and (more obviously) Deus Ex, the story is also revealed in-game via special encounters and scripted events.

"One of the important goals with Unreal 2 is to create a game that has high-intensity combat and yet tells a real story with interesting characters," elaborates Verdu. "We intend to do some of the storytelling and character interaction on the Atlantis, between missions. We will also have 'slow times' during the combat where NPC [non-player character] interaction and storytelling become the main focus of gameplay.

"With character development, we are trying to move the genre ahead a bit. We want the player to have conversations in realtime, not the stilted, horrible 'choose-a-dialogue-statement-off-a-menu-while-the

-NPC-does-an-awkward-idle-animation' conversations that are common to the current crop of games."

To this end, dialogue options will work more like the bot commands in Unreal Tournament. If the player responds too late, then there is every chance the character waiting for an answer will get impatient and either change the topic or turn away. It's entirely possible to interrupt others, leave in the middle of a statement or response, or invite a third party into a conversation.

According to Verdu, the flipside of this complexity is that dialogue will be short and to the point - the player's responses will generally be a few words. "The player needs to be able to assess the possible responses and decide what to say without feeling like he's really under pressure, because the NPC might get testy and walk away. But it's a good trade-off. We want a dynamic and fast-paced experience, not a talk-a-thon."

Active worlds

Away from all the chattering, this dynamic and fast-paced experience is a leap ahead of the original Unreal in terms of variety. Though indisputably breathtaking, Unreal's world suffered from a grinding linearity, and while its creatures were equipped with exceptional AI, the environment was often alarmingly uninhabited. Judged by any yardstick, the world of Unreal 2 will be vibrant and alive, densely populated by numerous warring factions of which the player and his crew are just one (see Sixty Seconds of Singleplayer).

Such an active world throws up a raft of gameplay possibilities that Legend has embraced with enthusiasm. Each mission will feature a different tactical situation, including hostage rescue, civilian escort, an assault on an enemy base with a squad of friendly troops, defence of a structure or area against attack, stealth-based infiltration and reconnaissance, as well as more traditional search and destroy

sorties. Between missions the player will return to the Atlantis to research collected items (such as new weapons), interact with fellow crew members, and re-arm for the next objective.

The enemies (not to mention potential allies) the player will meet throughout the game are equally varied. "The Skaarj return from the first Unreal," says Verdu, "but they're the only ones. The rest of our bestiary is brand new." Some of the other creatures Legend is willing to reveal include an assortment of Mercenaries (cybernetic warriors of tiered skills and abilities), the Striders (genetic mutations that can absorb armour, weapons and even spacecraft), and the N (trans-dimensional beings that can occupy different places in space and time simultaneously). As in Unreal there will also be AI bots to compete against in a tournament structured for the solo player.

However, it's the animation of all these enemies that should really impress. Work is progressing extremely well on incorporating a skeletal animation system into the Unreal engine. The benefits of this are clear:

"We can create large numbers of complex animation scripts for our characters and blend them on the fly," explains Verdu. "We also have controllers for individual components of the model that allow us to create dynamic facial expressions. We believe that the new technology will give our characters life and personality unlike anything seen before in an Unreal-based game."

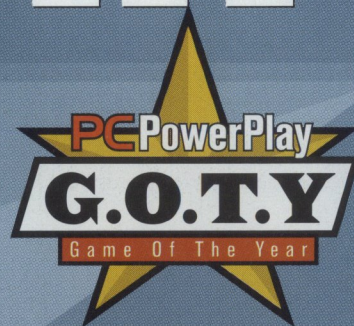
Mark Rein's spiky-haired friend is only the first evidence of this ambitious claim. Throughout many of the game's new features and advancements in technology - the superb animation, the expansive outdoor terrain, the character interaction, the convincing AI - there is one recurring motif: naturalism. Could it be that even the game's title is a misnomer? Unreal 2 may well end up just... real.

GAME OF THE YEAR

How was 2000 for you? If the votes in PC PowerPlay's Game of the Year award provides any indication, last year was a time of dark nights, future dystopia, conspiracy theories, and of course guns. From LAW rockets to AK-47s to stealth pistols, it seems that nothing tickles your fancy quite so much as a game that involves shooting stuff. The titles you voted into the top three positions are ample evidence of this inclination.

What other trends are there to ascertain from your selection? Although the standard 2D realtime strategy and roleplaying games still feature highly, the success of Deus Ex signals a shift toward more complex world simulation and demonstrates the willingness of players to embrace game which cannot be easily pigeonholed. (Pigeons, Deus Ex - geddit?) In addition, both Counter-Strike and Unreal Tournament confirm the necessity of not only accessible online games but the community such titles are able to foster online.

We were pleasantly surprised by the high placings of Thief 2, Shogun, and Combat Flight Sim 2, depressed by the appearance of Daikatana even at a lowly 46th, and greatly amused by all those who put Black & White, Return to Castle Wolfenstein and countless other unreleased games in their top ten. Someone even voted for Doom 3. Anyway, congratulations to Deus Ex and the guys at Ion Storm, Austin. Until next year...



CREATIVE NOMAD JUKEBOX WINNER!

The reader, drawn at random from all the votes received, who wins the Creative Nomad Jukebox is I. Kennedy, Campbelltown NSW

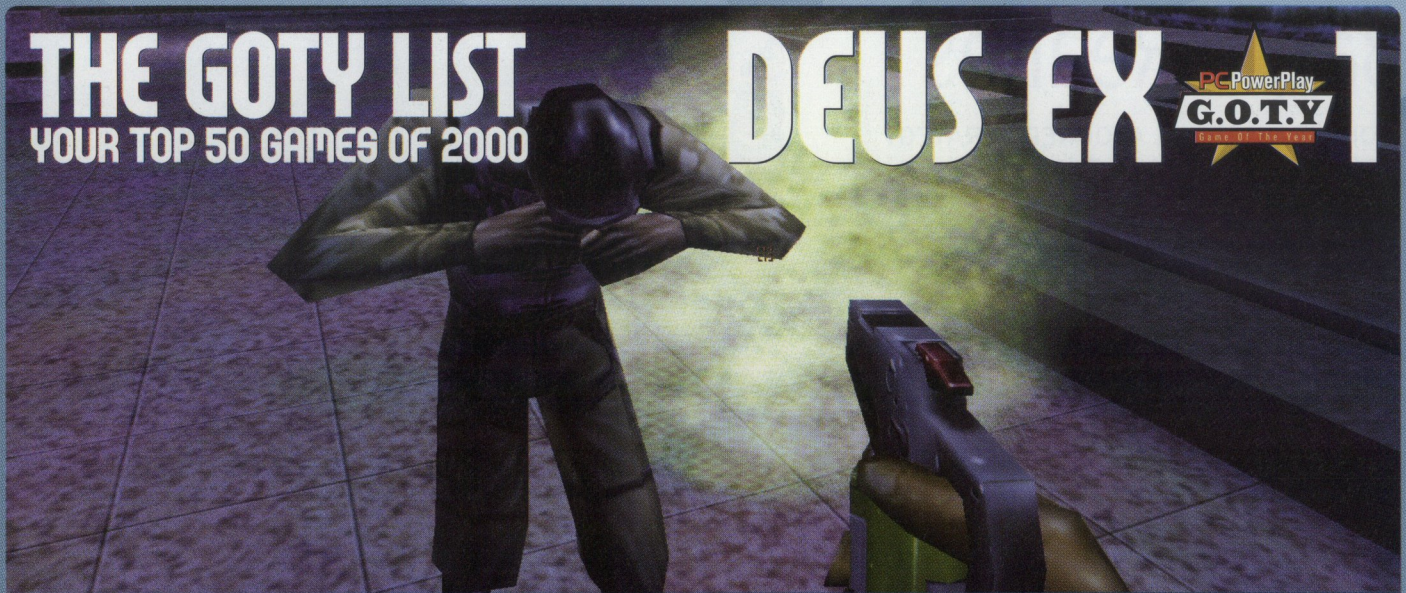


THE GOTY LIST

YOUR TOP 50 GAMES OF 2000

DEUS EX

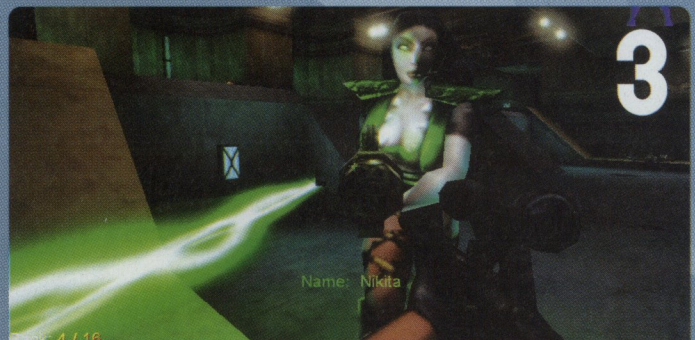
PC PowerPlay
G.O.T.Y.
Game of the Year



1. DEUS EX



2. COUNTER-STRIKE



3. UNREAL TOURNAMENT



4. AGE OF EMPIRES II: THE CONQUERORS



5. COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT II



6. THE SIMS



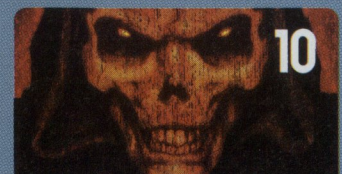
7. ESCAPE FROM MONKEY ISL



8. BALDURS GATE II



9. THIEF II: THE METAL AGE



10. DIABLO II

- 11 SWAT 3
- 12 Shogun: Total War
- 13 Crimson Skies
- 14 Quake III Arena
- 15 Hitman
- 16 Starlancer
- 17 Grand Prix 3
- 18 Planescape: Torment
- 19 Combat Flight Simulator 2
- 20 MDK 2

- 21 Half-Life: Opposing Force
- 22 Earth 2150
- 23 Ground Control
- 24 Heavy Metal: FAKK 2
- 25 Star Trek Voyager: Elite Force
- 26 Homeworld: Cataclysm
- 27 Messiah
- 28 Omikron: The Nomad Soul
- 29 Dark Reign 2
- 30 Mechwarrior 4

- 31 KISS: Psycho Circus
- 32 NBA Live 2000
- 33 Tony Hawk 2
- 34 Icewind Dale
- 35 Combat Mission
- 36 Dirt Track Racing
- 37 Enemy Engaged
- 38 Soldier Of Fortune
- 39 Thief Gold
- 40 Black & White

- 41 MS Flight Simulator 2000
- 42 Midtown Madness 2
- 43 Motocross Madness 2
- 44 Nox
- 45 Return to Castle Wolfenstein
- 46 Daikatana
- 47 Vampire: The Masquerade
- 48 Pharaoh
- 49 Theme Park World
- 50 Janes F/A 18 Hornet

Battle Realms

LIQUID EASTERN-FLAVOURED STRATEGY
TITLE BEGINS TO TAKE SHAPE

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Liquid Entertainment

PUBLISHER

blah

AVAILABLE

3rd Qtr 2000

URL

www.battlerealms.com

In what promises to be a milestone upon which all proceeding RTS's shall be compared, Liquid's Battle Realms continues to take shape as the most immersive strategy title yet seen. Replete with Eastern philosophical undertones and a Feudalist setting, this title incorporates an as yet unheard of level of realism into the strategy format. Players hiding their troops in dense foliage must be careful, if they don't wish to alert foes, not to disturb birds nesting there. Blazing buildings must be attended to lest their flames spread to other structures. Battle Realms is, in a word, realistic.



Terrain detail
is superb

Cunning
camouflage?



Klingon pubs:
very smelly

Away Team

THE NEXT STAR TREK GAME FROM THE
ACTIVISION STABLE COMES INTO DOCK

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Reflexive

PUBLISHER

Activision

AVAILABLE

March

URL

www.stawayteam.com

Like Desperados (previewed later this issue), Star Trek: Away Team owes much to the Commandos legacy. Yes, folks, it's squad-based tactical combat time once more - albeit with a distinctive Trekkie touch. Brent Spiner (Data from The Next Generation) features, narrating the tale of the crew of the USS Incursion. Gameplay revolves around stealth and infiltration type missions, something in keeping with the Federation's peaceful objective. In many ways this is perhaps the antithesis to Voyager: Elite Force.

They even get
Austar!

Who are you
calling pussy?



Morrowwind

TOTAL FREEDOM, TOTAL RPG, TOTAL
GIANT CATS IN LEATHER JERKINS

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Bethesda Softworks

PUBLISHER

Bethesda Softworks

AVAILABLE

Qrt 4 2001

URL

www.elderscrolls.com

Heralding freedom back to the often story-stifled realms of PC RPG-ing, The Elder Scrolls 3: Morrowind looks to be a boon for liberty loving gamers. Bethesda are apparently swimming against the gaming trend tide here by choosing to neglect the two staple mainstays of today's RPG genre: online questing and heavy plotlines. Instead, Morrowind shall be a free form, character driven affair powered by an impressive graphics engine and thousands of NPC's in a gorgeously large 3D world. Innovative? You bet.

(left) Eriq
adjusts his
cuirass



Conflict Zone

AT LAST THE CHANCE TO TURN THE BIG
GUNS ON RICHARD CARLETON

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Mathmatique
Appliques

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

AVAILABLE

Qrt 1 2001

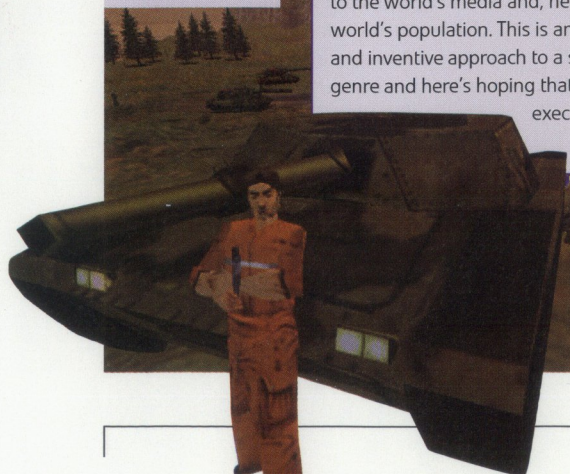
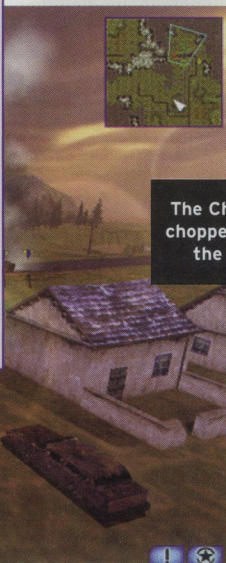
URL

www.ubisoft.com

Previewed in PCPP #54 as 'Peacemakers', the French developed Conflict Zone has since developed greatly in the technical department but, happily, the premise remains the same: conduct a war for the camera. Reminiscent of biting film satires such as 'Wag the Dog', the goal of Conflict Zone is to conduct a war which is both presentable and justifiable to the world's media and, hence, the world's population. This is an intriguing and inventive approach to a stagnating genre and here's hoping that it will execute well.



The Channel 7
chopper scopes
the siege



Evil Islands

DANIEL STAINES TAKES A HOLIDAY WHERE EVEN THE COCONUTS HAVE TEETH...



Rod Stewart and Baldie go hunting together



Lord Howe resort: totally anarchic

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Nival Interactive

PUBLISHER
Ubisoft

AVAILABLE
June

URL
www.nival.com

Upon first impression, he appears somewhat... skanky. Haystack blonde hair falls in tattered strands over a gaunt, sickly pale countenance while refugee thin arms hang limply and unimposingly on an emaciated frame. His clothes are tattered, his eyes are squinted and his weapon contemptible (*His what? - Ed*). He is definitely not hero material. Or is he? Say hi to Zak, protagonist and hero of Nival's latest roleplaying effort, *Evil Islands*.

If you just looked up from the page and said "latest?" in an incredulous and confused tone, don't worry. It's okay not to have heard of Nival, even PCPP hadn't. For (y)our

Evil Islands does not reward idiotic feats of charging bravado and muscle bound stupidity

edification then, Nival is a burgeoning Russian software house, best known previously as the developer of the *Rage of Mages* series. According to the press release, Nival 'knows games' and if the demo of *Evil Islands* we received is anything to go by, we'd have to agree with this sentiment wholeheartedly.



Set on the island of Gipat which floats in the Astral Halo (setting of the *Rage of Mages* series), *Evil Islands* is an RPG romp with several interesting twists that warrant more than a cursory glance from the average gamer. For instance, consider a fully 3D world populated by a plethora of 3D rendered friends, foes, flora and fauna for your sickly hero to interact with - all displayed at a very consistent framerate.

Impressed yet? Well, just stop and consider the game mechanic itself. Nival, not content to turn out yet another bland, bargain bin fodder RPG, has introduced something rarely seen in RPGs - stealth. That's right: stealth. *El*, in a decidedly

different and, in our opinion, better take on the RPG genre does not reward idiotic feats of charging bravado and muscle bound stupidity. Instead, it is often necessary for players to adopt a more covert approach by either sneaking up on enemies and assassinating them or simply avoiding combat altogether. This adds an entire new dynamic to a sometimes tired formula and makes for a novel game experience.

Evil Islands is shaping up to be an impressive game. With its distinctively un-heroic hero, impressive engine and inventive gameplay, it certainly appears that Nival is set to cause more than just a ripple in the industry. Who knows, you might even have heard of them by then...

MYST III EXILE

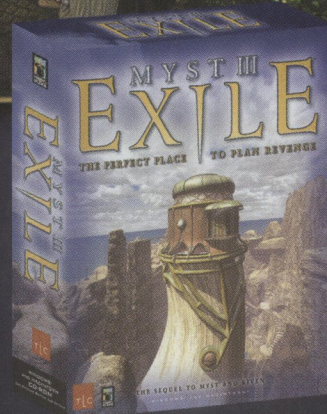
The Story of Myst Continues



THE SEQUEL TO MYST AND RIVEN
COMING MAY 2001



WWW.MYST3.COM





DETAILS

DEVELOPER
SpellboundPUBLISHER
EidosAVAILABLE
AprilURL
TBA

Desperados

AFTER LAST ISSUE'S BUDGET PC ARTICLE, ANTHONY FORDHAM HAS BECOME ACCUSTOMED TO LIFE AS AN OUTLAW. WILL SPELLBOUND CAPTURE THE SPIRIT OF LIFE ON THE RUN?

In the field of precision automotive engineering and finance, the Germans cannot be beaten. Their cars are the gruntest and their banks are the bankiest. But when it comes to recreating the Wild West, there are fewer German precedents to inspire confidence. Now, if Spellbound was an Italian developer, Sergio Leone's proud legacy would surely have seen the company through. But a German Western?

First impressions of Desperados scream "Commandos!" and indeed Spellbound owes much to Pyro Studios. There's an elegant symmetry to it: Commandos, developed by a Spanish studio, is set largely in Nazi Germany, while Desperados, developed by Germans, is set largely in New Mexico, where Spanish culture has a huge influence.

Who stole my horse?

Yeah well, Desperados is an isometric realtime tactical squad-combat game, driven by a classic Western story, chock full of Saloon bars, train robberies, plantation escapes, lynch mobs and gunfights at the OK Corral. Rather than develop a 3D engine and render all the cowboys as blocky polygons, Spellbound has chosen to use a 2D engine, allowing for extraordinary levels of detail.

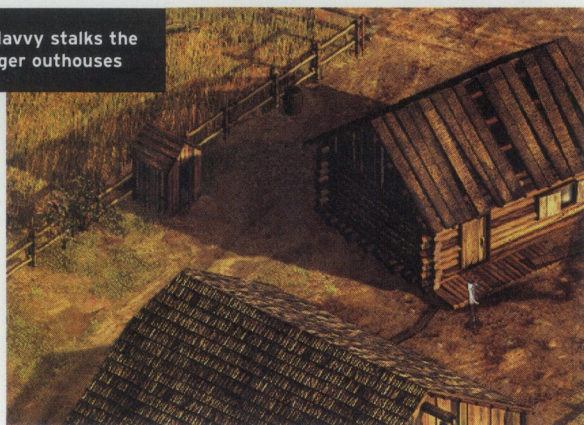
For instance, in the training mission, the lead cowpoke John Cooper meets up with his old coon-skin cap wearing buddy Cletus. As in "Cletus! Sie tragen eine sehr attraktive coonskinschutzkappe!" Cletus (actually his name mightn't be Cletus, but it should be Cletus) takes John up onto the roof of a nearby stable and challenges him to shoot a

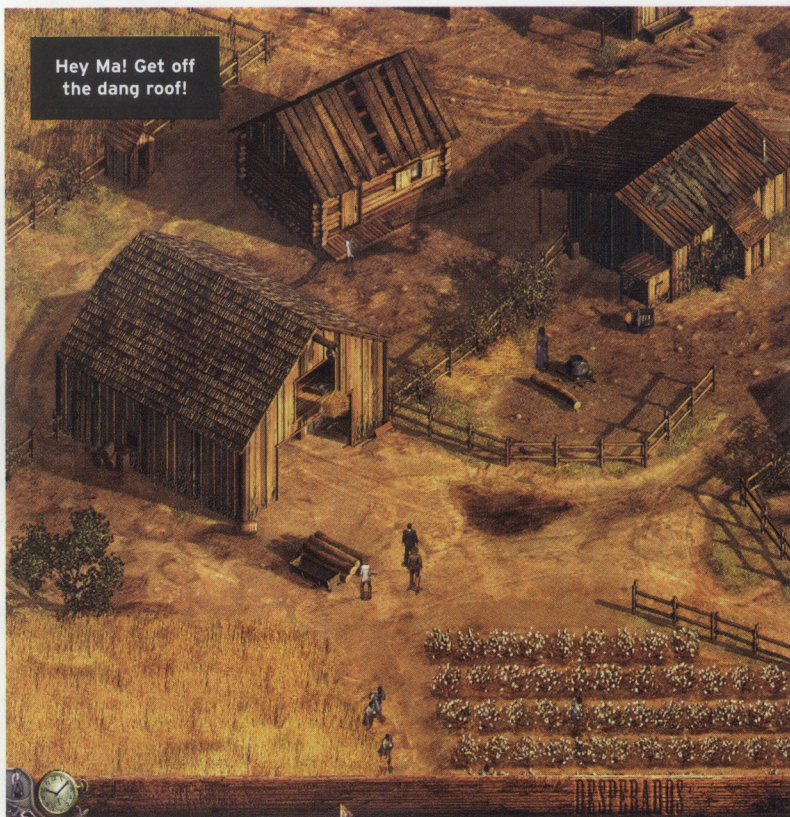
CARSON CITY ÜBER ALLES



How similar are Desperados and Commandos? How similar are Coke and Pepsi? Each game is played from an isometric perspective, in realtime, and puts the player in control of a group of commandos (cowboys) who are then required to complete some kind of task. Stealth and concealment are paramount, and both games use vision cones to show the cowboys (commandos) how close to discovery they are, although Desperados actually paints these cones onto the playfield itself, a little garishly. Die Vision-Kegel erscheinen etwas grell. Basically, take out the cacti and buzzards, and Desperados is Commandos. Whether this is bad thing, only time and a finished version will tell.

The lavvy stalks the larger outhouses





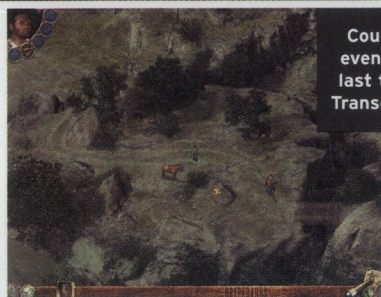
pot off a balcony across the street. Which John does, and the tiny little pot pings off the balcony and crashes into a horse trough below, complete with splash. This level of detail is maintained across the level; in the fairground, jugglers juggle, knife-fighters fight with knives and cowboys who feel lucky lay their money down on bare-knuckle prize-fights. Spellbound has created a living Wild West that keeps you... well, spellbound.

As the game opens, the player has control of one of the seven characters who will eventually be featured. As mentioned above, John Cooper is a classic gunslinger, tough, wiry, thin in the face and oh-so-cool. Each of the characters has a special ability, and John's speciality is combat. As well as his trusty shootin' iron, he can pummel opponents with his manly fists, and also throw his knife with deadly, silent accuracy.

Died with his boots on

Spellbound is not above cliché in much the same way as the ocean is not above the clouds - das Meer ist die Wolken nicht oben erwähnte - so that's why Desperados features a set of characters stepped fresh and smelling of horseplop right out of a Hollywood Western. Kate O'Hara, for instance, uses her feminine, honky-tonk wiles to distract enemies, flashing a bit of leg and frilly garter. She also has a mirror, which she can use to signal or temporarily dazzle pursuers.

Sam, on the other hand, is a grizzled prospector-type. So of course, in order to protect his strike, he has come to a special understanding of what Spellbound would call "das mächtige explosive Nitroglycerin". Sam blows things up; walls, doors, trains,



horses. "Sam! Sie haben den Saloonstab demoliert! Verlassen Sie hier schnell!"

And of course it wouldn't be a Western without a thin, serious-looking cowboy called Doc. Obviously, Doc is the healer of the gang, able to patch up your hombres when they get scraped in a scrape. He has also invented a very nasty knock-out gas, which he can deploy in grenade-like canisters, or attach to a balloon for wider dispersal. Don't play poker with him.

The co-ordination of these characters, and the skilful use of their special abilities

Kate O'Hara uses her feminine, honky-tonk wiles to distract enemies, flashing a bit of leg and frilly garter

forms the backbone of the game. The missions are strongly driven by the narrative - the usual guff about hidden gold, besmirched honour, stolen horses and oppressed slaves. In fact, the very first mission in our preview version dealt with the recovery of Sam from an evil plantation boss, complete with a gunfight on the porch of the Big House and running through cornfields dodging .45 bullets. Ausgezeichneter Spaß!

Clean up Dodge City

From what we've seen of Desperados - heavily unoptimised code with many features missing - the game really captures the spirit of the Wild West. Everything you've ever seen in your favourite Western is in Desperados. Lost mines, train-jacking, Indians, shootouts, the whole bit. But because the game is so very similar to Commandos and the upcoming Commandos 2, it seems as if Desperados will ride on the appeal of its kitschy theme rather than on gameplay innovation. If deciding the fate of a group of crazy cowboys (and gals) doesn't fizz your Sarsaparilla, then Desperados may not be able to follow through on the strength of its squad-based tactical gameplay.

But it's still early days yet. Once all of the characters are implemented and we are able to take a good look at some of the more advanced missions, Desperados might just be the perfect escape from the drab and dreary landscapes of war-torn Europe, circa 1943. We can expect our seat on the Carson City Stage to be ready around mid-April. But until then, singing: "Ich schoß den Sheriff, aber ich schoß den Abgeordneten nicht."

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Croteam

PUBLISHER

Gath. of Developers

AVAILABLE

April

URL

www.croteam.com

Serious Sam

CHAMPION OF THE UNDERDOG AND SLAVOPHILE
ANTHONY FORDHAM EXAMINES HOW THE NEW
KID ON THE BLOCK COULD KICK DUKE'S 'ASS'
ANY DAY OF THE WEEK. SERIOUSLY...



Seriously
toothy?

First up, a big g'day to all our Croatian readers. If you're a Croatian immigrant, or Australian-born Croatian, if you identify yourself as Croatian, if you even married or are just seeing a Croatian casually, you know, in case if you get along really well then maybe something might happen, then this article is for you.

Australia is a rich and stable Western country. Croatia, on the other hand, is not a rich and stable Western country. In Croatia, there are a lot more things to worry about in day-to-day life, including the draft, your house not being there in the morning, and the displacement of you and your family from land you've worked for generations. But this does not mean that Croatia is not a

viable cultural and artistic region, with much to offer the world. For gamers, this is best demonstrated by the continuing efforts of a tiny development studio called Croteam.

Croteam doesn't have much money, or a big flash skyscraper in Dallas, or Ferraris, and its single title Serious Sam has been delayed more than once while various members of the team have had to go and fight in actual wars. But the two Serious Sam technology tests available online and on our coverdisc show staggeringly enormous amounts of talent and gaming potential.

Seriously powerful

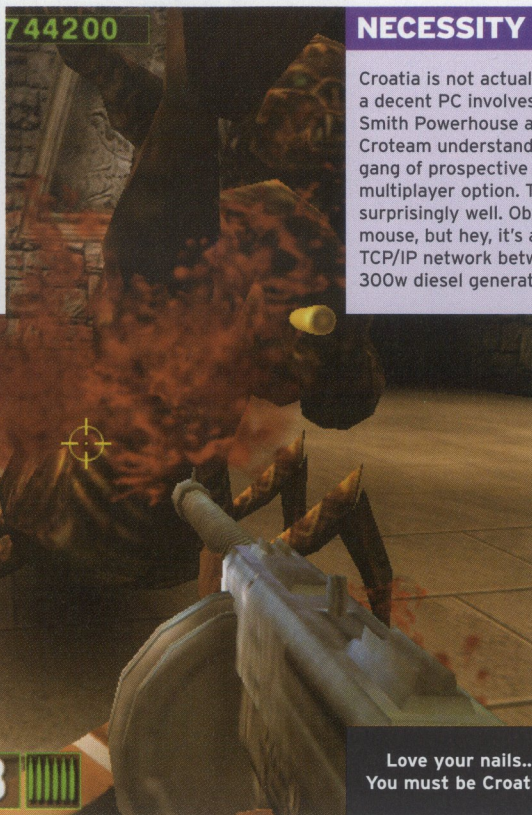
The design philosophy of Serious Sam is simple. Games like Doom had great gameplay because hundreds of enemies would descend on you

from all corners of the map, howling and gibbering and necessitating a bloodlust frenzy of chaingun action, but the graphics are now hopelessly outdated. Games like singleplayer Quake 3 have great 3D graphics, but the complexity of player models means only a handful of enemies can face you at any one time. Croteam has taken the nostalgically awesome gameplay of Doom, and the cutting-edge visuals of Quake3, and combined them to create something just a little bit special.

The Serious Engine is a hell of a thing. Croteam has gone to the all-you-can-eat restaurant of game design, opened the bumper menu of visual effects, and said, "I'll have one of each thanks, double helpings." Textures are huge and detailed. Outdoor areas are vast and spacious. The lens flare in

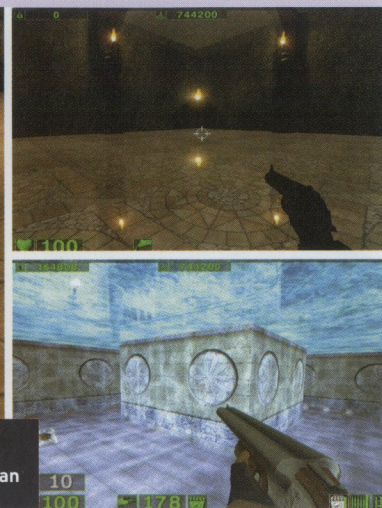


Sam faces the killer teapots



NECESSITY MOTHER OF INVENTION

Croatia is not actually a dirt-poor country, but getting a hold of a decent PC involves rather more than driving down to a Dick Smith Powerhouse and grabbing an HP Pavilion on the VISA. Croteam understands players may have only one PC among a gang of prospective Sams. So that's why there's a splitscreen multiplayer option. That's right, splitscreen. And it works, surprisingly well. Obviously, someone will have to go without a mouse, but hey, it's a hell of a lot easier than configuring a TCP/IP network between two PCs, especially if you only have a 300w diesel generator.



Love your nails...
You must be Croatian

Serious Sam is so over-the-top that enemies diving at you out of the sun have a very real tactical advantage. The engine supports environmental bump-mapping and also environmental reflections, so shiny objects actually reflect the room around them, not just a generic 'reflect-o-matic' texture. For a technology test, this looks fantastic. Quake 3 didn't look this good on its first public outing.

It does appear, however, that the engine may not support curved surfaces, which restricts the architectural complexity of the levels. Also, while the outdoor areas are the best ever seen, the halls and chambers of the Egyptian-themed test level are very simple and stock standard.

Seriously techno-magical

But for a technology test, Serious Sam offers tremendous value for download time. You get five weapons, a huge level in two parts, and a considerable array of beautifully modelled enemies. This is FPS gaming at its most fundamental. Serious Sam is one man against the forces of Notorious Mental, one man with a Schofield .45 equipped with a Techno-Magical Ammo Replenisher. Pick up another in the first chamber, and you can be Brendan Fraser in The Mummy, gunning down revenants with that crazy double-handed action.

Serious Sam is not about amazing AI and devious tactics. It's about dozens of dumb enemies overwhelming you by sheer weight of numbers.

The models are intricately detailed, they run, jump and fly, but at times the player will encounter upwards of thirty enemies on screen at once. Icarus

dudes dive out of the sun, gigantic humanoid scorpions rake Sam with chaingun fire, Werebulls charge, Beheaded Kamikazes run screaming from the shadows, bombs in each hand, Kleer skeletons 'conjure two-balls', all while Sam pounds away with his pump-action shotty and stupidly overpowered minigun.

Seriously traditional

Sure, look at any single aspect of Serious Sam and you may think the game is hardly bulging with innovation. This is Doom for the naughties, as I believe we're meant to call the new decade (*I prefer the 'Zeroes' - Ed*). But when you actually sit down and play

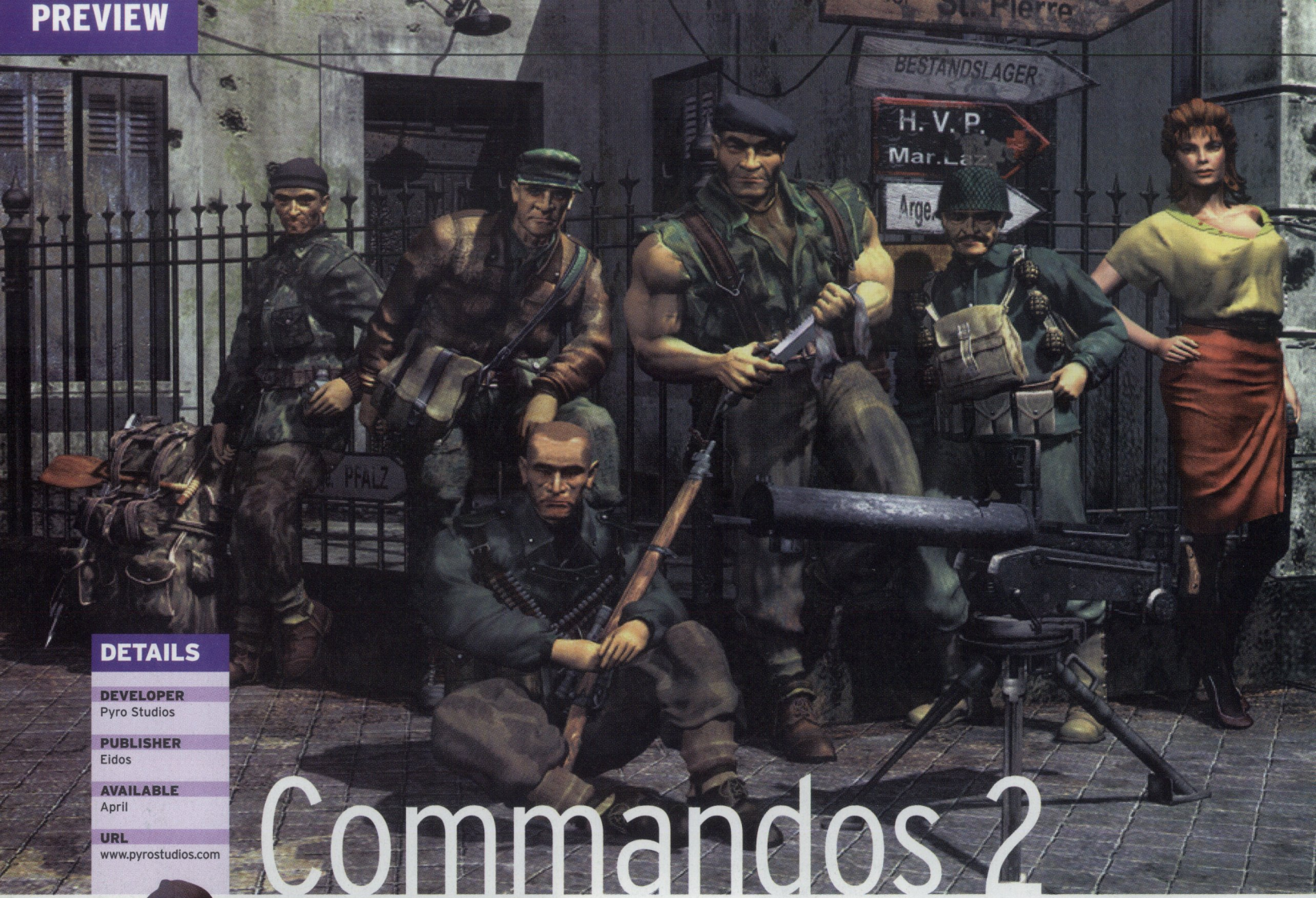
combines the awesome gameplay of Doom with the cutting-edge visuals of Quake

Serious Sam, a sort of spell takes hold of you. It's a fantastically fun game, even though this is just the technology test.

Serious Sam won't keep you glued to the PC for hours like Deus Ex does, but it's some of the best fun we've had with a shooter in months. It's so completely unpretentious. The enemies and weapons are kitsch, but kitsch done really well. The hero looks unashamedly butch-gay, and the visual effects are so over the top it's almost as if the game is taking the piss of itself.

Croteam clearly believes games are about fun, and silliness is fun, so Serious Sam as a title is filled with enough irony to please even the stoniest of eighth-generation wangolo Aussies. Install the test. Play it. If it's shootin' you want, Sam is set to deliver. Serious.





DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Pyro Studios

PUBLISHER

Eidos

AVAILABLE

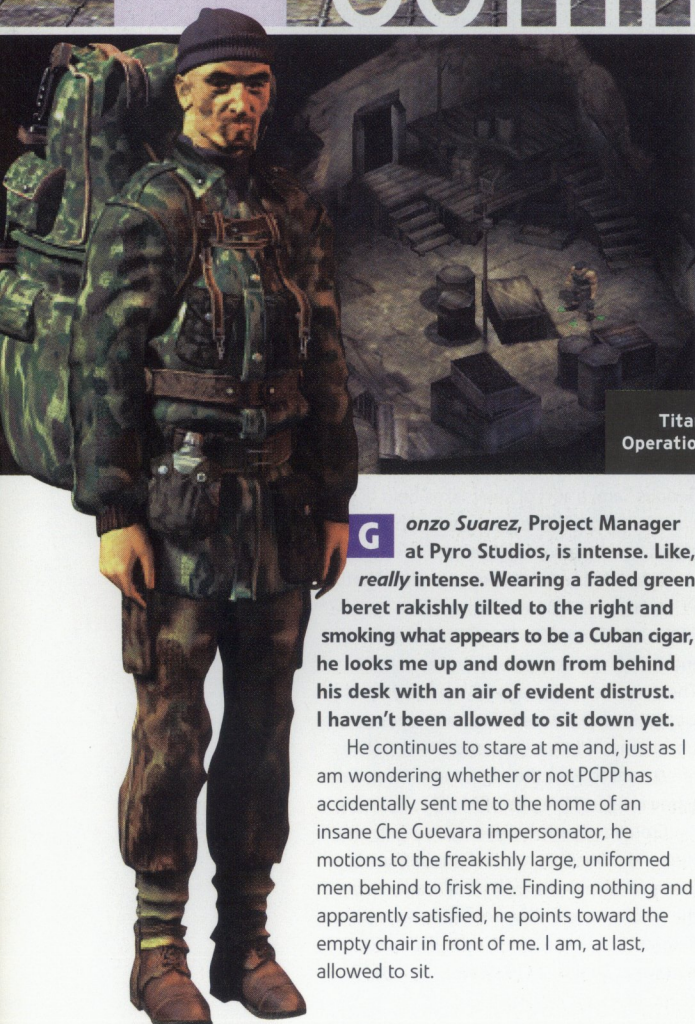
April

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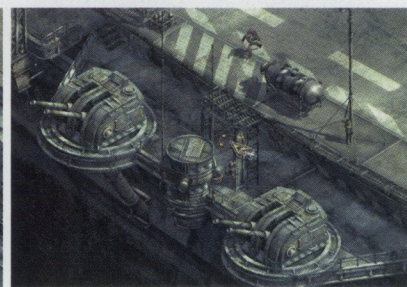
www.pyrostudios.com

Commandos 2

DANIEL STAINES DROPS ICE CUBES DOWN HIS CLEAVAGE TO RECREATE THE COMPLETE COLDITZ EXPERIENCE IN PYRO STUDIOS LATEST TITLE



Titanic 2:
Operation Kill Leo



Gonzo Suarez, Project Manager at Pyro Studios, is intense. Like, *really* intense. Wearing a faded green beret rakishly tilted to the right and smoking what appears to be a Cuban cigar, he looks me up and down from behind his desk with an air of evident distrust. I haven't been allowed to sit down yet.

He continues to stare at me and, just as I am wondering whether or not PCPP has accidentally sent me to the home of an insane Che Guevara impersonator, he motions to the freakishly large, uniformed men behind to frisk me. Finding nothing and apparently satisfied, he points toward the empty chair in front of me. I am, at last, allowed to sit.

Spread 'em

After a moment of silence and confused stares, Suarez briskly explains to me that he can not be too careful, that "spies are everywhere". Upon hearing that I only wish for information on Commandos 2, he lightens noticeably and even appears to become jovial. And why shouldn't he? Commandos, the isometric, squad-based tactical combat gem set in World War II, was an absolute rollicking success for Pyro. For all intents and purposes, Commandos 2 will be as well. Assuming, of course, that it manages to retain that great gameplay while expanding and innovating on the original.

"To improve on our prior success we have aimed to return to the same formula of doing

everything with the maximum attention and care so that the finished product has a quality that is above-average by today's standards," says Suarez at the mention of Pyro's previous hit. "In our products we attempt to be extra careful. We go over it once and again, and although we don't know whether it will be as successful as the previous game, we want the quality to be above reproach."

Feeling considerably more at ease, I begin to press Suarez for more information. Like, for instance, exactly *how* Pyro intends to improve an already fantastic formula without falling into the trap of simply beefing the technical side of things while adding a few new options here and there. Sure, the visuals are spanking and a few more

THE DIRTY 2/3 DOZEN

Owing to their popularity and cohesiveness, Pyro has thankfully seen fit to include the six original commandos coupled with a thief, Hotlips from the expansion pack and a military dog. Here's a quick run-down on their respective skills...

JACK O'HARA GREEN BERET

Quick and lethal. As close to a ninja as you will ever get.

JAMES BLACKWOOD MARINE DIVER

Submersive swimmer and can pilot sea-based vehicles. Like Aquaman, except cooler.

SAM BROOKLYN MACHINE GUNNER

He uses enemy machinegun posts and pillboxes, plus he can drive any land vehicle.

TOM HANCOCK EXPLOSIVES EXPERT

He blows things up and he's from the UK, suggesting then that he's a fan of soccer.

FRANCIS WOOL SNIPER

Just think long range, ultra powerful and undetectable and you should get a good idea.

RENE DUCHAMP INSURGENT

A master of disguise who, dressed as one of Hitler's boys, fraternises and distracts Germans.

NATASHA 'HOTLIPS' HOTLIPS

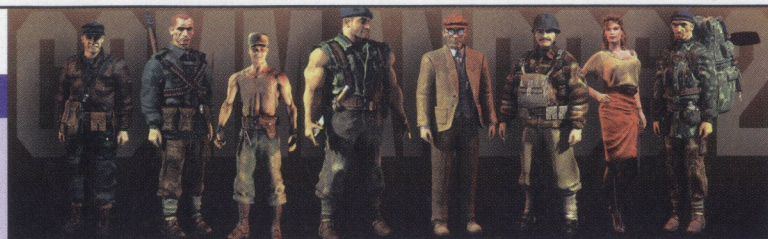
WWII seductress. First appeared in the expansion pack and now makes a welcome return. Useful for distraction.

PAUL LUPIN THIEF

Paul's main attraction will be his ability to plunder enemies of their vitals without being noticed at all.

MILITARY DOG ANIMAL

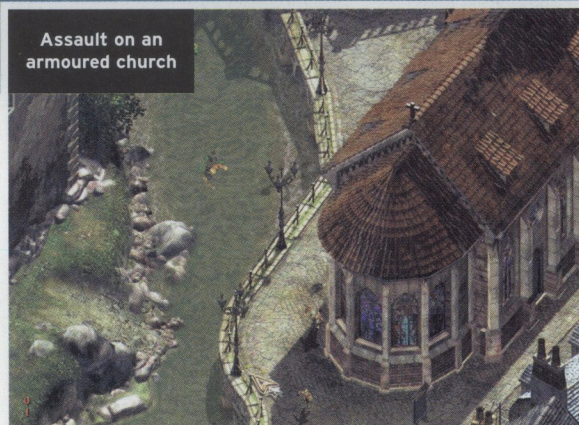
The dog can carry medical supplies to wounded comrades and bark and bark a lot at 3am.



The boys get buff and hop in a rubber dinghy



Assault on an armoured church



a mission where the player will be required to escape from Colditz, the most infamous of German POW camps

characters will be included, but what will make gamers want to strap on their best Nazi-killing pistols one more time?

Suarez smiles with a nonchalant and languid air. "One must find the balance between what is new and what is old," he begins. "What I have done in this case is to find a formula that Commandos players will like, but that does not involve playing that game all over again.

"This game is larger and dynamic; the gameplay is more indoors, and less abstract than the first Commandos."

Burlap sacks

Judging from what we've seen of the game, 'larger and dynamic' seems to be the perfect way to describe Commandos 2. Not only has the game engine itself been tweaked considerably, allowing more fluid perspective control, but the commandos under your control will be able to do their thing in all sorts of battle

scenarios, including Pacific jungles, northern European wastelands and cityscapes. There's even a mission where the player will be required to escape from Colditz, the most infamous of German POW camps.

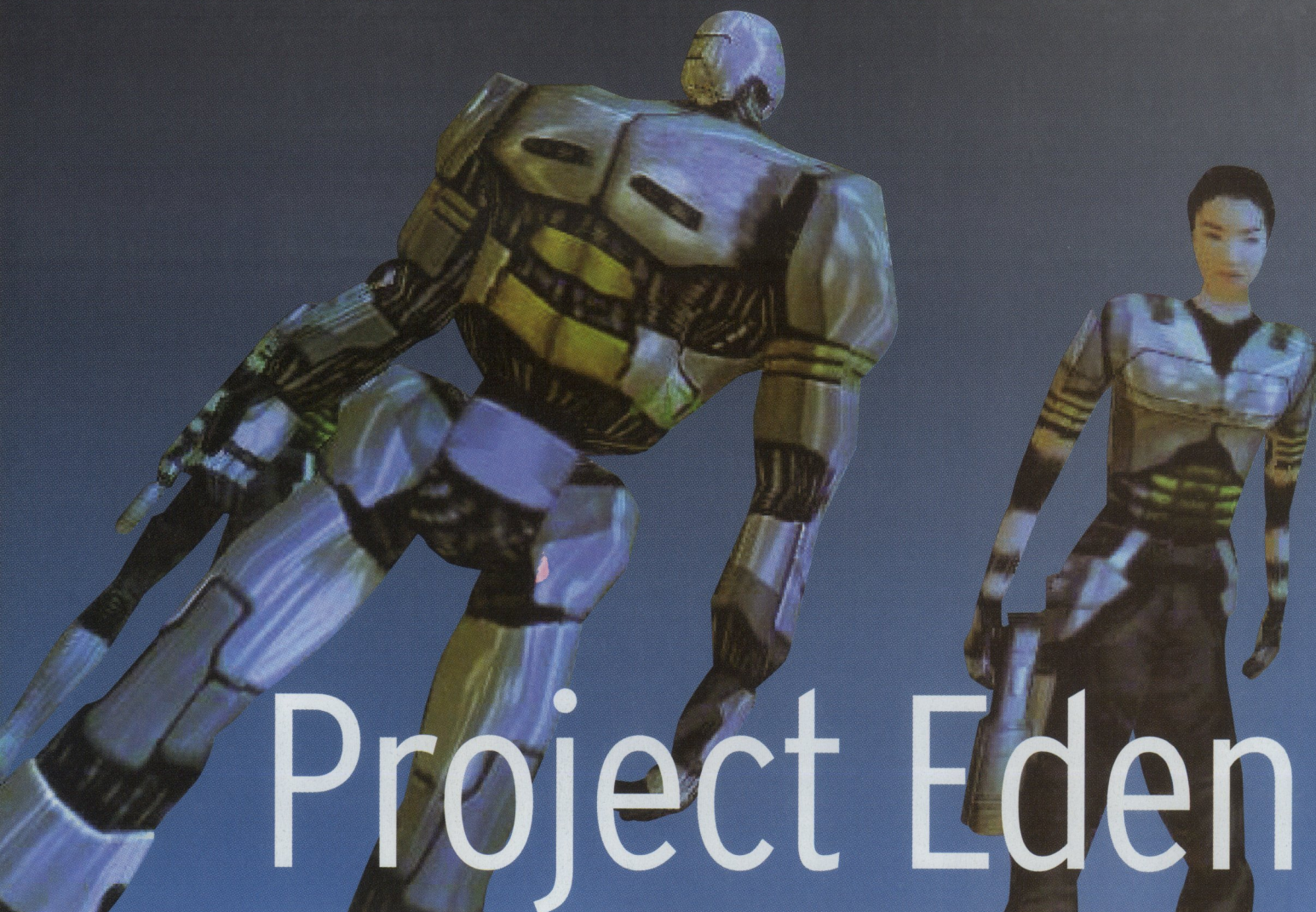
Such settings bring to mind one word: historical. I decided to probe further into this aspect of the game. How important is the historical context of the Commandos games?

This conundrum is met with ample ease by Suarez: "The historical touch is generally interesting for a game, but it guarantees nothing. Pyro is not a company that specialises in historical games, but what happens is that the historical license is a very pleasant license since people recognise it".

Interesting. But, historical context or no historical context, the big question still remains: What kind of product can we expect when we shell out our hard earned cash for a copy of Commandos 2? What has Pyro achieved here?

"Basically," he begins while motioning for his uniformed goons to grab me from behind, "we have attempted to make a game that is different to Commandos, but that appeals to the same player. This is what we hope to have achieved, but I don't know if we have"

Those are the last words I hear from Suarez' mouth. After the last syllable in that sentence was uttered, his security quickly had me trussed up in a burlap sack and dumped on the side of the road miles from the studio. This notwithstanding, we here at PowerPlay are *still* clammering to get our hands on a copy of Pyro's soon-to-be classic. And why shouldn't you?



Project Eden

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Core Design

PUBLISHER
Eidos

AVAILABLE
April

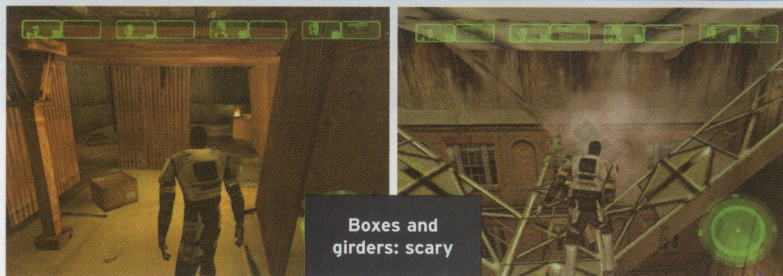
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www.eidos.com

GEORGE SOROPOS WAS EXPELLED FROM THE GARDEN AFTER BEING CAUGHT DRESSED UP AS LARA CROFT. CAN CORE TOO ESCAPE HER LEGACY?

Fans of 2000AD comics - Judge Dredd, in particular - might get a kick out of knowing that the hometown of their favourite nazi, MegaCity-1, was the inspiration behind the setting for Project Eden. Others might be impressed by the fact that Eden's developer was responsible for the first Tomb Raider and all the subsequent jollies generated thereafter - and we're not talking Angelina.

Project Eden takes us to a future where man has built up, up, and up, creating vaulting urban sprawls in which the rich and privileged live high above the despair and squalor of everyone else.

In this homely environment one to four players take command of a four-member team of operatives from the Urban Protection Agency. The UPA is an elite force made up of ex-librarians and down-on-their-luck Mr Whippy men, initially tasked to root



the age-old formula... missing technicians + factory setting = rampaging mutant human hybrid former technicians with green flaky skin

out problems at the 'Real Meat Factory', suppliers of genuine phallic replacement parts to the public for thirty years. Technicians sent to sort things out have gone missing without explanation, and we all know the age-old formula for that... missing technicians + factory setting = rampaging mutant human hybrid-former technicians with green flaky skin.

Group hug

One of the notable features of Project Eden is that you are working with a four-person team rather than going solo. As in Vampire the Masquerade, the AI controls the

majority of your three teammates' actions; all the player can really do is tell them to stay or follow. You can switch between characters whenever you like, and leave characters doing a specific action such as holding a lever in position or guarding an area. Characters not directly controlled will have a good whinge if they are under attack and will, apparently, defend themselves automatically. Though it remains to be seen how well.

Project Eden is in no way an RPG though - character abilities remain constant throughout the game, it's just the tasks that get harder. For example, hacking into a computer will

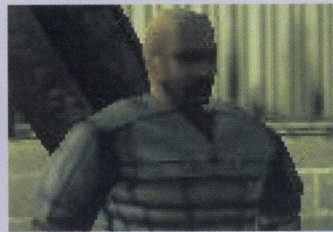
THE FOUR PLAYABLE CHARACTERS



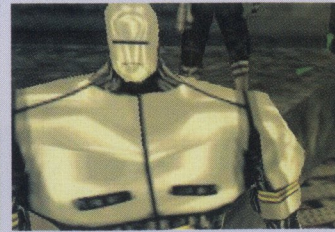
CARTER Squad Leader
Carter has plenty of experience and has worked his way up through the UPA ranks to his present position. Not looking forward to 'retirement' to a desk job at 40.



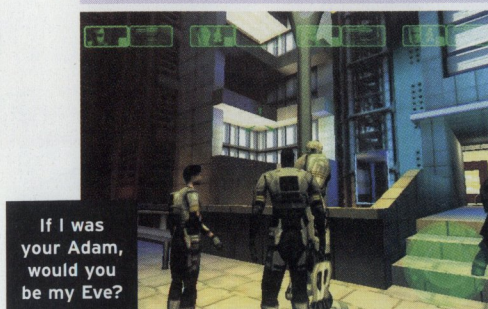
MINOKO UPA Tech Division
An orphan who was put into the UPA youth training program at 9 years after showing high levels of aptitude with computers. Became a full UPA operative at only 17 (the youngest age possible).



ANDRE UPA Engineering Division
A skilled engineer with a natural ability to understand and repair mechanical and electrical systems.



AMBER UPA Cyborg Division
Suffered horrific injuries in a Skyway accident at the age of 19 and chose to become one of the UPA 'Metal Heads' rather than have human-cyborg reconstructive surgery. Has a tendency to flirt with cigarette machines.



require playing a mini-game that gets more difficult as the game progresses, so it's up to the player to get more experienced at this game rather than their character.

With no character development to keep players interested Eden is relying on great action sequences and a good story to keep things moving. We asked **Gary Rummery**, Project Eden's Lead Programmer, to give us some clues as to what that story would be about and what form it would take.

"I'll call you back when I get out of the bath," he said. (*No, he didn't - Ed.*)

Oh, okay, he said this instead:

"The story is linear, but within levels you have a certain amount of freedom. I think multi-path stories are hugely overrated, they just annoy me because I want to know what would happen if I made the opposite decision, but I rarely get round to replaying a game to find out."

Core is so fond of the story cooperative multiplayer action has been included, giving a team of up to four people the chance to fight their way through the story together. It is in fact quite a rare feature in PC games and usually only seen in some FPS titles on console systems.

Hideous engine

All this is possible thanks to a highly sophisticated graphics engine, one that is certainly greatly in advance of the one seen in the Tomb Raider series. One can only guess the man-hours gained NOT revamping that engine has been better spent running Project Eden along the cutting edge.

According to **Gavin Rummery**, Gary's brother and team leader of the project, "The team is using lots of multitexture effects, such as bump-mapping, gloss-mapping, self-illumination textures and the like to give

different looks to the surfaces in the game. Core Design has a sophisticated particle effects system that enables the artists to create whatever effects they are after (anything from wispy smoke to lightning). The game also features volumetric fog and reflective surfaces.

"The characters have also been drawn and animated to high standards. The characters are fully skinned, and we can morph between models which means some of the enemies start out looking like normal animals and humans and then change in front of your eyes into incredibly hideous monsters."

If the gameworld really is as cool as MegaCity-1 and if the teamplay problems of Vampire: The Masquerade can be avoided, then Core surely has an interesting title on their hands. It may even erase those memories of endless Tomb Raider sequels.

State of Play

Firstperson Shooters

Usually in the grip of a permanent out-of-body experience, **Anthony Fordham** abandons the astral plane and returns inside his skull, to once again put himself first...

Way back when the Richardson's Arcade in Armidale NSW was still a thriving shopping centre, I found myself, new to long pants, walking past a now defunct Tandy Electronics Store. Glancing inside, I saw a slightly sickly shop attendant staring grimly at a 14" monitor while flat blue walls swung past with that special kind of parallax that makes you want to vomit. It was *Wolfenstein3D*.

Not so many years later, I found myself in a dingy arcade beneath Grace Bros in Sydney, staring grimly at yet another in-store monitor while grey metallic walls swung past, once again causing all those gathered to reconsider their lunch. This was *Doom*.

Wolfenstein3D showed us firstperson shooters were possible, *Doom* brought the genre to the masses and cemented its place in gaming life. These two games opened a floodgate to a new way of playing. Today, the firstperson perspective dominates PC gaming. Realtime strategy has an appreciable chunk of the market share, but FPS games still come out on top. *Wolf3D*, *Doom*, *Duke3D*, *Quake*, *Quake2*, *Unreal*, *Half-Life*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Quake 3 Arena*, and now *Deus Ex* command the respect and continued attention of a vast proportion of gamers. Each of these games, in its time, was hailed as

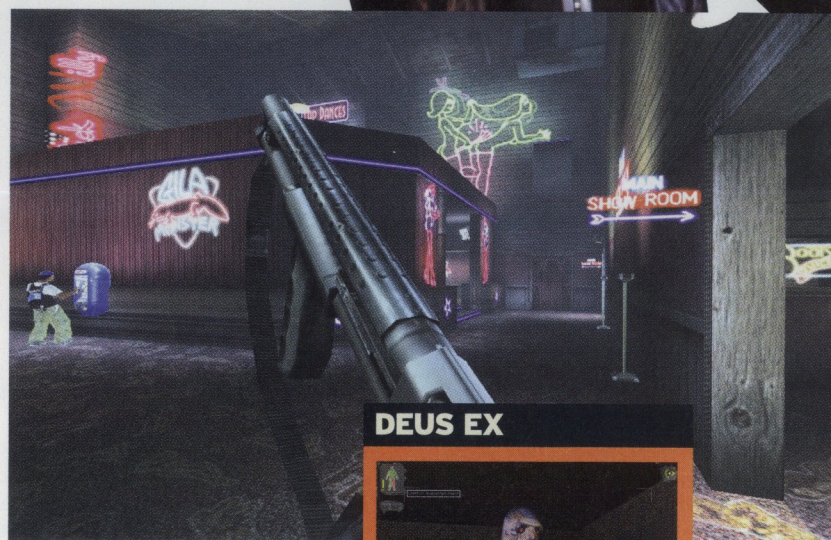
VIOLENCE!



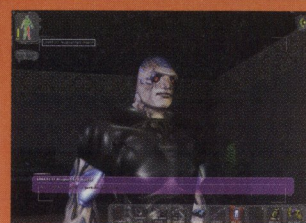
FPS games are among the most popular titles, but have produced some of the most explicitly violent content ever seen on a PC. From the original *Doom*, where one spirited reviewer cried "you can really see the pain!" to the seminal *Soldier of Fortune* that rewarded players for blasting limbs and heads into red mist, to *Kingpin* which highlighted the violence with high-level coarse language, FPSs have tried to shock and titillate. The mainstream media trots out footage of children playing *Doom* whenever someone underage kills someone else underage.

either the most important, or one of the two most important games in the market. As far as PC Powerplay's exhaustive research can tell, there is no gamer alive today who hasn't played some kind of *Quake*.

So we enter the new millennium with FPS on top. The strongest genre, the most powerful genre, the most respected genre. But because FPS games have scaled such heights, and because FPS has produced such truly stellar titles as *Half-Life* and *Deus Ex*, continuing to expand and develop the genre will necessarily prove extremely difficult.



DEUS EX



Combining the FPS gameplay mechanic with RPG elements and a strong story was one part of the real genius of *Deus Ex*. Choosing an established engine and understanding graphical innovation is worth very little after the twelfth hour of play. This is the only game in the PCPP office that we talk about in terms of "hey, you remember the bit where..." and "did you meet... or did you..." If you don't own it, buy it.

Looking at upcoming titles for 2001, it appears the average FPS chooses one of two design directions. There's the immersive reality simulator like *Deus Ex*, which has much in common with roleplaying games with a fairly free play mode, a large game world with many diverse locations and non-player characters. Then there's the *Half-Life* mode, featuring a linear, plot-driven game world with a restricted number of locations played through in a set order. This style of game - the most popular with developers it seems - focuses on scripted set-pieces to maintain player interest.

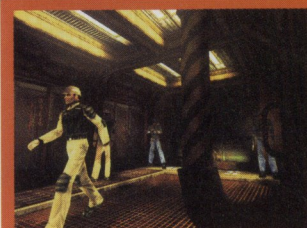
THIRDPERSON



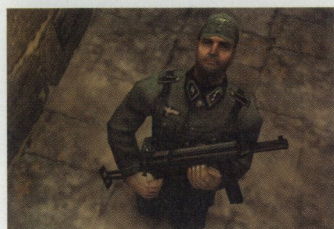
A sub-genre of FPS, the thirdperson shooter simply moves the camera from behind the main character's eyes to behind its head. Alice and Oni are the latest and greatest 3PSs, but games such as Heretic II are also fondly remembered. Even Hitman, while primarily a puzzle game, use the thirdperson perspective. Designers say the 3PS allows for a wider field of view and better situational awareness, but 3PS games are all too often plagued by unwieldy controls and an erratic camera.



RED FACTION



From Volition, the creators of Descent, Red Faction should breath new life into the FPS genre. Top of the gosh-wow list is the inclusion of a destructive environment. So at last shooting out a concrete pylon will indeed bring the house down around your ears. A reliance on scripted events means Red Faction will be packed with memorable moments, just like Half-Life.



Recently, we have seen Gunman Chronicles, which even used the Half-Life engine. The game was very linear, and scripted encounters occurred with clock-work regularity throughout the limited levels, but the scripting was entertaining enough to keep the game interesting. Giant dinosaurs ate spaceships, mutant nasties jumped out of the darker corners, it was all on rails, but it was great fun.

This year, we look forward to such titles as Return to Castle Wolfenstein, also subscribing heavily to the Half-Life style of gameplay. As everyone who isn't dead or mad knows, Castle Wolfenstein is a remake of Wolfenstein 3D, which as this article states, was the game that started it all. Castle Wolfenstein will take advantage of the Quake 3 engine to make the set-pieces even more spectacular. For instance, in the opening level, we see a group of marines land on the beach below the castle and get caught in a vicious fire-fight with occupying Nazi forces.

Battling your way through a rain of bullets, storming a pillbox and then continuing into the castle is a very exciting prospect, even if it is the same every time you play it.

In fact, the Quake 3 engine will form - and has formed - the backbone of a number of interesting titles. American McGee recently released Alice - and yes, we know it's actually a thirdperson shooter - a linear game punctuated with frequent dazzling set-pieces. Star Trek: Elite Force was also built around the Quake 3 engine, and while somewhat lacking as a shooter, it did the Star Trek universe justice with authentic visuals and convincing environments.

Looking forward, the Q3 engine will be featured in the latest James Bond game The World is Not Enough. Here we can expect even more spectacular moments in true 007 style. Also, the Medal of Honor franchise will receive another treatment in Allied Assault.

TWINE and MoH represent another trend in FPS games; the use of 'realistic' weaponry. The firstperson genre was built on sci-fi foolishness, with the likes of plasma guns and BFGs littering the halls of those early games. In this millennium, we expect to see a greater number of realistic shooters, with a focus on real-world

weaponry and situations. Soldier of Fortune made a move in this direction in 2000, but fell into the trap of 'the old ultra-violence'.

The battle of the engines will continue, with Doom III and Unreal 2 set for release sometime in the next couple of years. Since FPS games have such simple gameplay, a great amount of time can be spent focusing on the game technology. Early demonstrations of the Unreal 2 engine look nothing short of spectacular, with game environments moving closer to photo-realistic. Doom III, on the other hand, we know nothing about, except that American McGee saw the lighting effects and they were 'amazing'.

Of course the only game we at PC Powerplay are really drooling for is Deus Ex 2. But we know absolutely nothing about it, except that it exists. Or will exist, sometime, we don't know when. But rest assured, the second we get a Deus Ex 2 screenshot, we'll splash it gaudily all through this fine magazine. In the meantime though, there are a number of meaty FPS games to look forward to. Install PS2rate or upgrade to USB, and prepare to get fragging.



Black & White

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Lionhead Studios

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

AVAILABLE

March 23

URL

www.lionhead.com

WITH ONLY A FEW WEEKS NOW TO WAIT, ANTHONY FORDHAM SPEAKS TO PETER MOLYNEUX ABOUT THE MOST ANTICIPATED GAME OF THE YEAR...

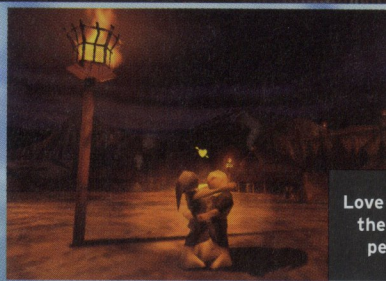




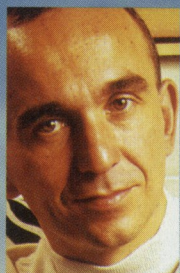
Worship me, pathetic peasant, for I am a giant towering teapot!



I foolhardily thought, "How can a story take longer than six months to implement? That was so naive on my part"



Love among the little people



"We're three days, three hours away from finishing the game."

So cries **Peter Molyneux**, lead designer on *Black & White*, surely the most hotly anticipated game of the new millennium. Before we even find our bearings, before we can sit down and have a coffee and work out where the hell we are, before we realise Guildford, UK is uncannily like the richer parts of Strathfield, NSW, Molyneux is anxious to tell us *Black and White* is nearly finished.

In what is increasingly becoming a cliché, *Black and White* has been described - often - as "a roleplaying game in which you play the role of God." A sorcerer or junior deity of some kind comes into a virgin land, equipped with a chapelful of miracles and a voluminous sleeve packed with nefarious spells.

With an unspoilt, atheist landscape offered before it, the deity proceeds to make its mark. Its actions and decisions affect how the inhabitants of the no longer unspoilt land view their new God. Belief is power, and with power comes more magic, more situational awareness and eventually, a titan. With this titan - or 'creature' as Molyneux insouciantly calls it - the new God can make its mark in areas of the world where no one believes in

gods. But other gods wait in the shadows, in the glens, in the ancient and mystic places full of elemental power. There will be war. War fought on a divine scale.

This is *Black & White*. It's a god sim. It's an immersive reality. And we want it right now. But alas, it still isn't finished. In order to stave off the terrible pains and mental cramping, Peter Molyneux offered us a generous interview to hear the Gospel, as it were, of *Black & White*.

Teatime in the Saloon Bar of the Horse and Groom

We met with Peter Molyneux in a Guildford pub, only to find his life is now dominated by bugs. Cockroaches in the drains, locusts in the sky, and of course, tiny glitches in his beautiful game, the only thing holding *Black & White* back from release. In a chunky sweater and stylish slacks, Molyneux appeared frustrated, but flushed with excitement and success. *Black & White* is nearly there. Which means it's nearly here. Which means we can hardly sit still.

Despite first look upon preview upon speculation upon wild, gasping editorial, no one really knows what *Black & White* will be like. Until now we haven't even

known how the player will get into the game, how the story will drive the action, and how all the amazing pieces of Molyneux's vision will fit together.

While we were still crammed into an economy seat of a limping 747 as it shuddered over the Middle East, we had decided this was not going to be an interview in which PC PowerPlay intended to mince words. Hours later, comfortable in the pub, we stare Peter Molyneux in his steely eye and demand, "All right Peter, why has this game taken so bloody long?"

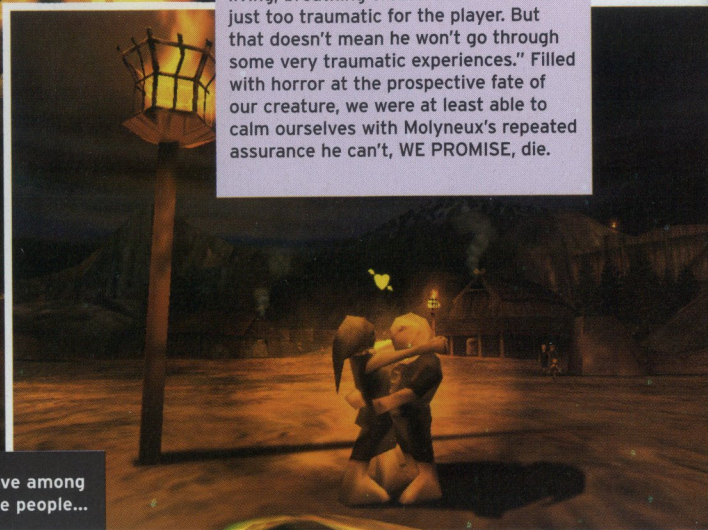
We think we're being investigative and hard-hitting. But he just laughs it off.

"Okay sure, the first line of code was written on the 14th of February 1998, St Valentine's Day, so it shows you what our priorities were that day! When Lionhead was started, we had absolutely nothing, we didn't have one piece of code to do anything. That was an incredible contrast to the days at Bullfrog where I had all of the drivers set up to start off with. So one of the reasons it's taken so long is that everything has had to be built from scratch, every single line of code has had to be typed in, and it's come up to two million lines of code.



SPARE MY BABY!

One thing that surprised us was that the creature cannot in fact die. He can be subjected to all kinds of abuse, he can be neglected, punished, scarred and pummelled, but he will never kick the final bucket. "Look how people react to the death of their Tamagotchis," says Molyneux, "These are just little purple blobs in a piece of plastic. Having your living, breathing creature die would be just too traumatic for the player. But that doesn't mean he won't go through some very traumatic experiences." Filled with horror at the prospective fate of our creature, we were at least able to calm ourselves with Molyneux's repeated assurance he can't, WE PROMISE, die.



More love among the little people...

"The thing that's taken the longest time of all though, and the thing we did underestimate, and the reason we got the release dates wrong, was the story. I had foolhardily thought, 'How can a story take longer than six months to implement?' That was so naïve on my part, because I had never done a story like this before. I didn't realise that the Black & White story, because it was so multi-threaded and adaptive, would take longer. So the story itself has taken over a year now.

"We've consulted people in Hollywood, really trying to pull in the talents of people who have done this kind of thing before. One thing that became obvious was that none of us had the experience really that was necessary. We've spoken to a lot of people about the story, you know, what bits to put in what bits to leave out. If you had to put in at anything and say 'that took the longest' then the story would have to be it."

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was "Cool!"

So the Black & White story has taken a year to implement. But what will playing the game actually be like? How will the game begin? What will be the first thing the player has to do in Black & White? Molyneux twitches back the curtain for a tantalising glimpse.

"In the opening scene of the game it becomes obvious that this little village of people haven't ever believed in a God because they haven't needed a God. And then for one reason or another you come into the world as an act of their God. Within the first three quarters of an hour you think, 'Yeah, it's nice, I'm the only god in the world,'

but what becomes obvious very quickly is that there are other gods. The game mechanic in Black & White is that the more people that believe in you, the more powerful you become as a God, and as the story progresses this becomes more obvious. After you meet a few other gods, some of who are friendly some of who are not, it turns out there is one god who is trying to get the whole world to believe in him, and the way he goes about it is in completely the opposite way to how you play. The game looks at how you play and adapts this other god's play style to suit. In fact the game will morph all the characters in the story around you.

"And there are lots of branches in the story; some things only happen if you tend to be a bit evil, other things will only happen if you tend to be a bit good. There's over 400 chapters possible in the Black & White story, but that could be far less if you play the game a certain way. So even if you play the game five times, you're almost guaranteed to have a different story each time."

Black & White will have a definite narrative, but getting this narrative across is necessarily difficult, since the player is not actually a character in the story as such, more a sort of disembodied presence.

"That's why you have two advisors who are like your consciences," Molyneux explains. "One's a little devil and one's an angel, and obviously the good one tries to get you to do good things all the time and



the evil one is trying to get you to do evil vicious things all the time. And it's up to you which one you actually listen to. They are also the narrators of the story, because the player doesn't have a voice. In addition, there's a god called Kazar and another one called Lethis, then there's your main opponent called Nemesis, all of whom have completely unique personalities that depend on how you play the game.



**Titan amateur boxing:
cataclysmic!**

"When you actually get into the game, the very first thing you see is this little family - a husband and wife and a child walking down to the beach. And the child runs off into the water, and these sharks are about to close on him when the parents start praying, and it's that prayer actually calls you to the world and begins your experience there. That's the very beginning of the game. It all just goes from there."

You think I am, therefore I am?

Black & White has an astoundingly versatile interface. The level of interactivity in the game has rarely been approached, and certainly never bettered. A simple game philosophy underpins all aspects of play: if people believe in you as a god, then you will have power to change their world. Molyneux elaborates:

"What makes Black & White different is this idea that everything is inside the world. It sounds very trivial, but it's very important. What I mean is that if you take the interface for example, there aren't any icons around the screen. All you've got is a view into the world, there's nothing around the screen at all. The fact that you've got only one way of doing things in the world, and that's with your divine hand, sounds very limiting but in fact it turns out that there are incredible things you can do in the game."

"I can give you an example of that, because one of the things you can do as a god is cast miracles, and the system we've created allows you to do things with those miracles which are incredible. There's a simple fireball spell in the game, and when

you pick up a fireball, you throw it and wherever it lands it burns. The idea with that was if you face another god you can always attack them by throwing these fireballs. Now, I was watching one of the testers playing the game, and to my amazement, what he did was he reached down with his hand, picked up a few trees and piled them up and stuck this rock in the middle of the pile of wood. And then he threw the fireball at the pile of trees, and that lit the pile of trees, and he added a few more trees, and slowly the rock inside the pile got hotter and hotter and hotter until it was almost like molten lava. He then picked that up and then proceeded to just dab it around the landscape, and wherever he dabbed it, because it was so hot, things just burst into flame. He had effectively created his own weapon using the game system. And that really bowled me over when I saw it, and that's just one example of when people have done something unexpected, because the game doesn't at all restrict you."

"What I mean is that there's one gameplay rule. Inside areas of the world that believe in you, you can do anything. And that's the design criteria. And when I say anything, I mean anything that physically makes sense. You can pick up a rock and throw it, you can smash things, you can pick up absolutely anything and interact with anything in the world. While outside the areas that believe in you, you can do nothing. You can't move anything, you can't influence anything, you can't interact with anything."

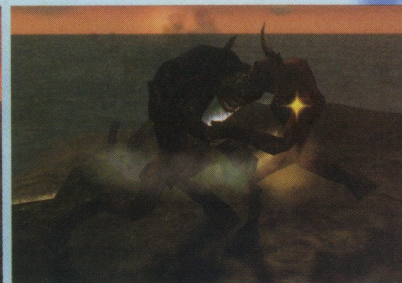
"If you want to do things outside your influence, you have to throw things from

SITTING ON THE FENCE

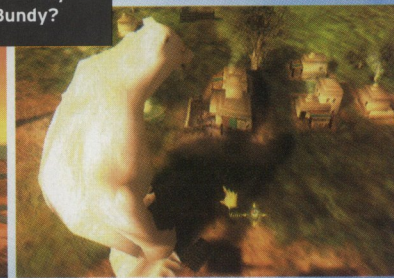
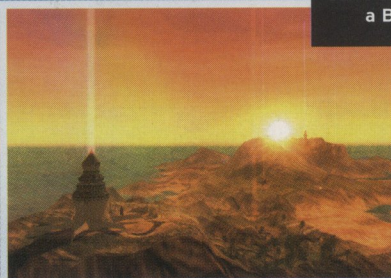
A title like Black & White suggests there aren't any shades of grey. While it's possible to be only a little bit good or only a little bit evil, perfect neutrality is not something that has a place in the Black & White universe. This is because belief is a resource, in order to survive as a god you need people to believe in you. The only way to make people believe in you is to perform divine acts, miracles and cast spells. These are designed in such a way that every spell, miracle or act has some kind of alignment value attached to it. Smashing a house with an enormous, superheated shark is bad. Saving butterflies from drowning in a pond is good. Remember, when Lucifer rebelled in Heaven, and all the fallen were cast into Hell, even - and especially - those who didn't fight were condemned. So pick a side, don't just sit on the fence. Because if you're not careful, David Wildgoose might burn that fence down. With a shark.



Spiky temple to David's evil cow



Can I offer anyone a Bundy?



your territory out into neighbouring territory, and you have to use your creature to do things. Now that simple rule really allows people to invent a lot of their own stuff, and that's very much what we thought would be the best thing in the game. We give you loads of these miracles, and we also give you the interface to use them, and really, if you want to use them the obvious way, fine, but if you don't then you can use them in all sorts of amazing ways. And that in itself is I think a real gaming revolution."

Remember the Titans

"But everything I've said so far pales into insignificance compared to the creature," says Molyneux. His pride and joy within *Black & White* is surely the titan, controlled, nurtured, guided and evolved by the player. Featuring astounding AI, the ability to learn, borderline self-awareness and persistent scars, the titans of *Black & White* are to Tamagotchi what a six-metre Great White is to your pet goldfish. Get Molyneux started on the titans, and you'll need special equipment to make him stop.

"Anything that I've spoken about so far that you can do in the game, you can teach your creature to do. For example, when you're playing a multiplayer game, you can

play cooperatively, so you can have two people playing one god versus two people playing another god. So you can pick up one of these fireballs again and throw it to the other hand that's playing on your side, and if they catch it, then that fireball powers up by five percent, and if your teammate throws it back, it powers up by another five percent. So when you're playing multiplayer you can see these players throwing fireballs back and forth knowing that they're going to release it at any time and it's going to be pretty cataclysmic. Now, you can teach your creature to do that, you can throw a fireball at your creature, he catches it, he throws it back at you. What you can teach your creature has no limits at all. You can teach him anything you can do in the game. And if you ask me what the most amazing thing in the game is, I guess it's that you can teach your creature, and he will learn.

"In gameplay terms, you can think of the creature as your physical presence in the world. You can't do anything outside your influence, but your creature can. So you can get him to go outside of your territory and do the things that you've taught him. It's another example of the power of the game world. If you teach your creature to eat little

people, you can then take your creature into another town that doesn't believe in you, a town that believes in your opponent, and your creature will eat all the little people.

"In truth, the game really depends upon how you've trained your creature. You can take him out there, you can meet another creature, and they'll fight. There's a fully featured fighting game inside *Black & White*, and how that fight progresses will depend on your training of your creature."

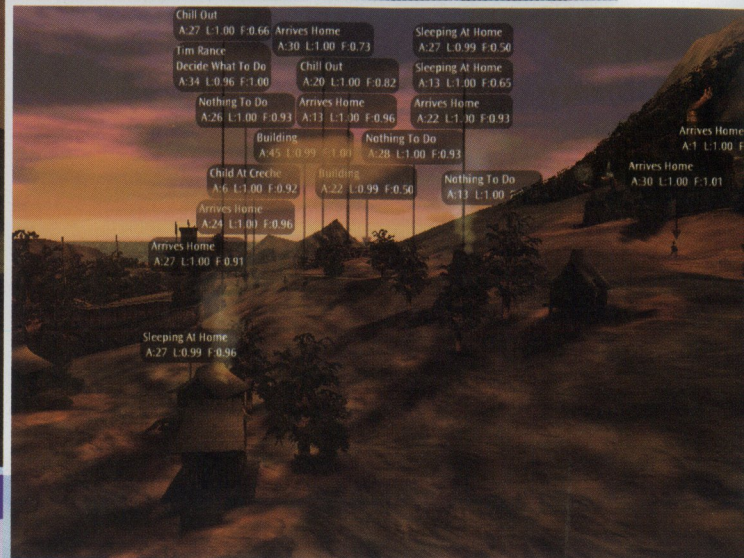
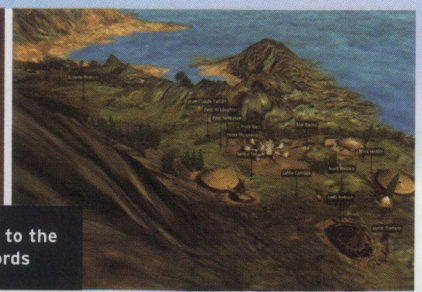
one of the testers effectively created his own weapon using the game system

Landscape gardening

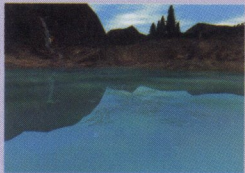
Another fascinating aspect of *Black & White* is the morphing of the creature and the landscape, depending on the alignment of the player. Earlier demonstrations of the game showed bright and cheerful countryside slipping into dark and dismal decay, and a proud and noble lion becoming a hunched and slaving beast. Molyneux speaks about this 'alignment-morphing' as it appears in the final version of the game.



Phallic architecture to the God of Floaty Words



CRUEL TO BE KIND



So you begin the game with the opportunity to save a small child from a pack of hungry sharks. David was all very interested in this scenario, but in his typical style he wondered if it would be possible to first simply leave the child to be eaten. "On the other hand," he continued, "what if I could save the child, but then push the parents in to be eaten? Or maybe pick up a shark and drop it near the parents? Or perhaps I could let the child get chewed a

bit, then beat the parents to death with the mangled corpse? If I don't do anything, will the sharks still be there in the morning? Can I use that superheated rock, dip it in the ocean, boil the sharks, and then feed the sharks to the family? Or vice versa?" He's a sick man, there's no denying it, but it's a tribute to the power of Black & White that this line of questioning can even be entertained.

"It works better than I had hoped actually, the fascinating thing about that is, when you see someone else's creature, you know exactly what it's like. It is like looking at a load of stats, but visually. You'll know if a creature has been in a lot of fights, because he's cut and scarred. Whether he looks good, whether he looks evil, how tall he is, how

your creature stays with you all the time and keeps learning and growing

muscular he is, really it's like a sixth-sense, you know: 'I don't want to go near that creature' or 'that creature's friendly,' or 'I reckon I can beat the... beat that creature up.' That is an amazing thing. Also the ability to tattoo your creature is just great, you can imagine there's been loads of creatures here in playtesting with mad tattoos all over them.

"Little subtleties change too, you'll be listening to the music in the game and you'll realise there's a very, very subtle morph to the alignment that you're playing. So it's not only what you see in the world, it's also what

you'll hear. You'll think 'I haven't heard that instrument before' and you'll realise that's because you are becoming more evil or more good. But the world itself changes too, the sky will darken, everything will look a bit more grey,

everything will look a bit more scary. If you're good, it will start looking at little bit more bright, more wonderful, maybe a little bit too nice, almost a little bit wimpy nice. I didn't want the good to look amazing and the evil to look horrible. That would be too easy.

"Your alignment even affects the type of miracles you can cast. There's one miracle which sends a flock of doves over the world, and anyone who sees it becomes impressed with you as a god. Of course, if you're a little bit evil you'll notice a few of the doves won't be doves at all, they'll be bats, and if you're very evil they'll be all bats, there's lots and lots of subtle things in the world that change."

Stop playing with yourself!

Multplayer options can make or break even the greatest of games, and Molyneux assures us Black & White will not disappoint. Rumours of persistent online worlds (B&W Universe), an online arena for deathmatch-style play (B&W World) and a strange hybrid of creature husbandry and ICQ (The Gathering) have all been posited by gaming press. Here Molyneux sets the record straight on the multiplayer modes we can expect in the game.

"When you get B&W there's three games in there. There's the B&W story, which everyone has to start with. You have to start and you have to get a creature. Once you have that creature, then you can go online with the creature, and find another player to play with or to play against with your creature. Now this is a very unique feature, the persistent nature of the creature. When you go online with him, he still carries on learning when he's online, he still carries on changing, growing stronger and getting more scars, and this ability to take him online, playing for hours and hours or even weeks, and then taking him back into the story, is really amazing. Although he may have grown three times the size and learned ten times the things he knew before he left the story, you can still carry on with that creature. And the singleplayer story will change itself and adapt itself to cater for the fact that you've got a bigger creature, that you're more evil suddenly, and then you can go back online again. So there's this idea in B&W that it doesn't matter where you are, you can be online, you can be offline, playing the story, or playing the skirmish game, your creature stays with you all the time and keeps learning and growing, and that's quite unique I think.

"The second game is multiplayer using clans. Online we're supporting clans, so you can set up a clan, and that clan has one creature and one identity. The clan has effectively one profile - good or evil - and you can invite people to join your clan, and when you fight, you fight for your clan. In all multiplayer games, when you play a game



you get credits. If you win a game you get a lot more credits, if you lose you only get a few credits, and when you've amassed a certain number of credits, then you can buy certain things for your creature. For example you can change your creature to another creature, you can get your creature healed, there's lots of things you can do for your creature online with these credits. And so there's a really good reason for a clan to play up through the multiplayer.

"Finally, the third and final part of multiplayer is the skirmish game, which is more like a traditional level-based game where you go from one level to another battling against gods. It's quite similar to the kinds of games you would have played before in terms of structure and length of a game, it's the quickest multiplayer game type.

"There can be a maximum of four creatures in a multiplayer game at the moment, but we are considering a patch to go to eight and see how things go. Plus you can have four people playing each god, so a total of sixteen players at once."

By "four people playing one god" Molyneux means each player will have a hand of their own, even though all four

represent the one deity with the one creature under its control. Molyneux briefly mentions the kinds of tasks players will have to manage in a multiplayer game, and says the distribution of tasks and responsibility for different resources is another unique point of Black & White.

"Once again it's up to you as players to decide what to do. If two people are playing one god, one may look after the creature and the other may look after the villagers, you do the miracles, I'll look after all the crops. This is something you can decide on the fly, it's very dynamic and makes for a very dynamic multiplayer game."

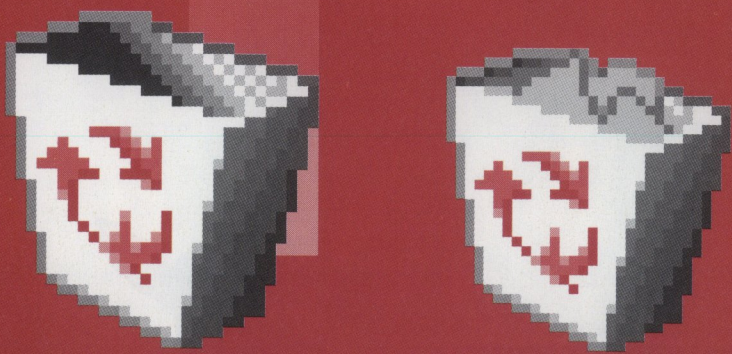
The Agony

So Black & White is, at long last, nearly finished. After our lengthy interview, Lionhead has only three days and two hours before shipping the final code. It is the first game Peter Molyneux feels really happy with. "I wasn't really that impressed with any of my other games, except Populous I suppose, it was probably the best of a rather poor bunch."

Three years of very hard work is about to pay off for Peter Molyneux and the team at Lionhead. From the enthusiasm he feels

toward the game, it seems almost certain that Black & White will be an excellent title. As for Molyneux himself, once the courier has left with the precious gold master CD we all crave so much, he believes there will be only one sensible course of action. "I'll be getting exceptionally drunk," he says, "I think I'll have earned it." A bare handful of weeks remain before Black & White is ours. But the one question that remains, the one question Peter Molyneux can't answer is... can we wait for that long?





ABANDONWARE

For the sake of memory, across the Net, Abandonware junkies keep the old games playing. But where does historical preservation end and piracy begin? **Daniel Staines** examines the many ethical and legal dilemmas...

SCREEN SHOT



What's a memory worth to you? While this question is clichéd, antiquated and, admittedly, a tad cheesy, it is one of unquestionable importance, particularly in the world of today's PC gamer. Don't think so? Well, let's say, for instance, you are the owner of an old game widely regarded as a classic. You have talked to more than few people online who would love to get their hands on this dusty treasure. There must be many more with a similar interest, for the game was immensely popular yet difficult to find as it is no longer published. Indeed, the publisher itself no longer even exists. What does one do? Post it online for download even though the game is still legally under copyright? Or allow it to rot, unused, unappreciated and forever forgotten? Is the protection, edification and distribution of a fond memory worth breaking the law?

These are all questions regularly asked by those in the abandonware community. The term abandonware - popularised around 1997 when the scene began - refers to the preservation and free-distribution of old games in order to preserve and protect memories that may have been otherwise forgotten. What this entails practically, however, is a little less fragranced with musty odour of pure nostalgia. Starting with a few disparate 'classic' fan sites, abandonware has now grown to such an extent that it is an Internet entity distributing free 'abandoned' software and games to thousands of people each day.

There, however, is the rub: with such a massive amount of games and sites available, the line between what constitutes abandonware and what doesn't has become blurred in the

growing community. Some argue that this has led abandonware down a path that will inevitably end in a situation similar to warez and porn sites fuelled by banner ads and disinterested profiteers.

A once proud community

Tom Walker (aka PsOmA), Australian webmaster of the largest abandonware ring on the net, Ring of Ages, commented on this disturbing and ever apparent trend: "There is certainly an increasing

'THERE ARE A NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO SEE ABANDONWARE AS A POSSIBLE SOURCE OF PROFIT, WHO WILL CREATE SITES CENTERED AROUND COMMERCIALISM RATHER THAN THE LOVE OF THE GAMES'

number of people who see abandonware as a possible source of profit, who will create sites centred around commercialism rather than the love of the games," says Walker. "It's sad. I'm seeing a once proud community become a cesspool of money and greed."

This kind of sentiment raises a few interesting questions for Abandonware adherents. If money is playing an ever increasing role in the community, how can it be, as Sarinee Achavanuntakul (aka Underdogs) describes, "easy to separate true abandonware sites from the pretenders?"

Achavanuntakul is webmaster of Home of The Underdogs, a site that, although not strictly abandonware, offers a large number of classic games for download. He is also the focal point of a recent furor that has engulfed the abandonware community and may have changed the scene as a whole in a quite significant way.

"In early November 2000, I was cc'd an email that the IDSA [Interactive Digital Software Association, a large anti-piracy organisation based in the US] sent to register.com, my domain name registrar. The email basically stated that my site had violated register.com's policy, and so should be removed," he relates. "I sent the IDSA four consecutive emails, asking for clarification of their intent and a list of games they want removed as often it's not clear who owns the copyrights. To date, I have not

received any response. Hence, I have voluntarily removed downloads I believe are copyrighted by IDSA members, as an act of goodwill to them and to show that I mean no harm to their members. Although how exactly you can harm companies who aren't selling these games anymore is a big question."

Indeed, this is definitely a big question and one that simply will not go away, either for the abandonware community or for the people who want to shut it down. IDSA, unfortunately, did not respond to any of our emails requesting an interview (a rather common practice, it now seems). As such, it is only possible to go on what is explicitly stated on their official website (www.idsa.com) in regards to software piracy. Under the FAQ section of the site, IDSA contends that, in regards to abandonware: "The current availability of a game in stores is irrelevant to its



THE ESSENTIALS

Some things a serious abandonware connoisseur simply cannot do without. These things are:

UNRELEASED	Unreleased Error Patch	1014 KB
UNRELEASED	WIN95 cd Patch	366 KB
UNRELEASED	VBS vcrtime Patch	1267 KB
UNRELEASED	Type Mismatch - Error 13 Patch	422 KB
UNRELEASED	CPU Killer	631 KB

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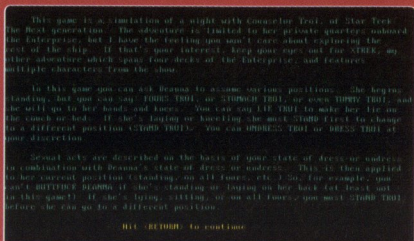
1. A CPU SLOWER

If you're running anything faster than a 486 - which I hope you are - then, on some games, you'll need something to slow down your clockspeed to make the games playable. CPU Killer does the trick nicely and can be found at www.eurekasoftware.com.au/support/patch.htm



2. A SIERRA ADVENTURE GAME

These are staples of any abandonware diet. Anything from the early King's Quest or Leisure Suit Larry games should do to satisfy your poorly programmed adventuring needs.



3. A TEXT BASED GAME

It is absolutely necessary, if you are to be an abandonware junkie, to play at least one text-based adventure game in your life. The stupider it is, the better. I'd suggest going for something dirty. Really dirty.

copyright status. Therefore, the copyrights of games are valid even if the games are not found on store shelves, and copying or distributing those games is a copyright infringement."

This clear and completely correct argument forms a mere part of an entire archive of legal technicalities that could be utilised to shut down abandonware sites. For instance, the fact that copyright on a product lasts for 75 years, regardless of retail status, is another contentious point that simply can not be ignored by abandonware aficionados.

1. Is it legal?

The answer here is a quite definite 'no'. Although Doom's source code is public domain, the game itself is not... at least not for another 70 years or so. In fact, this school of thought - represented by organisations such as IDSA and the SDA - would sound a resounding 'no' in the face of all questions about abandonware. And, technically, they are quite right. Abandonware, despite it's innocent veneer of nostalgia, is illegal. However, so is swearing in public, but how often do you see police enforcing *that* law? The answer, of course,

'THE COPYRIGHTS OF GAMES ARE VALID EVEN IF THE GAMES ARE NOT FOUND ON STORE SHELVES, AND COPYING OR DISTRIBUTING THOSE GAMES IS A COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT'

Defining Abandonware

Of course, there is another non-legal issue which is yet to be properly dealt with in the community: when exactly does a game become labelled abandonware?

While some would argue that it is *time* that plays the pivotal role in the abandonware status of a game, Achavanuntakul of Underdogs and others like him would contend that it is the *level of commitment* on behalf of the publishers that defines a game's abandonware status. Take, for example, id's firstperson classic, Doom. Perhaps an examination of the status of Doom might provide a clearer definition of what constitutes abandonware and what our legal position is as abandonware gamers.

Is Doom really abandonware? Let us take a detailed look at four distinct schools of thought on the Doom matter:

is never (thankfully), simply because it's not efficient or financially viable. Police have better things and so to it is with piracy bodies. Bill Struzzi (aka. Shadow) of Gaming Depot clarifies and expands on this by saying: "It (abandonware) is blatantly illegal but ignored to some extent by the software publisher associations such as the BSA, SIIA, and IDSA because distribution of abandonware games causes no revenue loss to the publishers. In essence it's cheaper to leave abandonware alone."

2. Has 'reasonable' copyright lapsed?

This particular school - which is, admittedly, growing smaller everyday - purports that a game attains abandonware status based on the amount of time (often five years) that has passed since publication. This makes for easy classification of games and neatly skirts a number of

publisher/developer commitment issues which often make for cumbersome debate. It has been more than five years since Doom first became available, hence, it is now abandonware. However, the problems with such a system are obvious. For instance, how does one decide how much time elapses before a game can be declared abandonware? It appears to be quite arbitrary and, frankly, haphazard.

3. Is the game still on the shelves?

This argument as is simple as it sounds - if Doom is no longer for sale, then it must be, by definition, abandonware. Of course, IDSA would beg to differ, as mentioned above, and there are quite a few problems with this particular take on abandonware. How does one decide what is 'for sale' and what isn't? Doom can be found on few retail shelves, but various sites still sell it cheaply and, indeed, it itself still retails the product on its own site. And what were to happen if one were to declare a game abandonware only to find the publisher later decides, as often happens, to re-release it?

4. Does the developer still support it?

This is probably the strongest argument for the classification of abandonware and it unquestionably the most popular. What it contends is, basically, that abandonware is defined by the amount of support a publisher or developer gives a particular title. Doom, for instance, is no longer supported or distributed by id. So, owing to the fact that it no longer costs or brings them money, it is classified as abandoned. This end of the old games spectrum further states that since it is not doing publishers/developers (many of whom are now defunct) any harm by distributing their games, they can only be doing them good by keeping their products alive and by inspiring interest in their company amongst a whole generation of new gamers. This argument is strong but flawed. The problem is basically, once

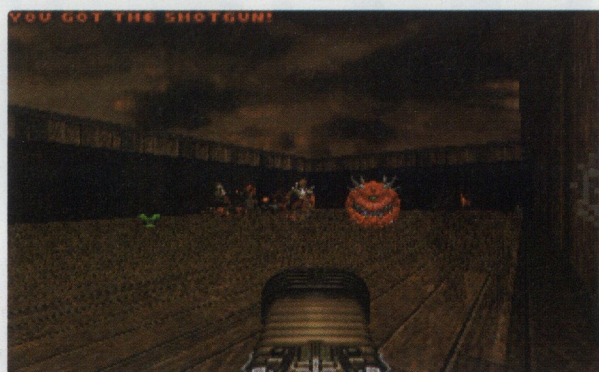
again, a matter of definition. How does one decide whether or not a company no longer supports a product? Even in obvious instances where individual developers have gone bust, it is entirely possible for a publisher to retain rights to and in fact make money from a title that would generally be considered abandonware.

The Bottom Line

So where does this leave us gamers with a fondness for the old days and the abandonware scene in general? Unfortunately, in a limbo of vague definitions and legal technicalities. Which is a crying shame, for the motives behind the majority of those in the community are noble, if still idealistic.

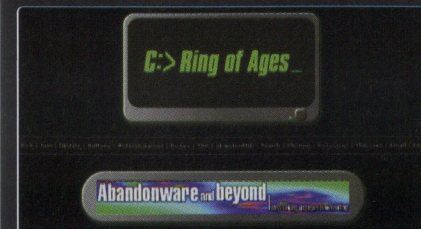
"I believe that software that is no longer being sold or supported should be made available, freely, to the public," says Ring of Ages webmaster Tom Walker. "Otherwise there is no doubt that we will lose many classics forever. In actuality, that's a testament to the ideals of the scene - to archive lost classics in order to preserve them for future generations. Sure, they may not hold as much nostalgic value as they do to us today, but a good game is like a good movie - timeless."

Perhaps the whole notion behind abandonware revolves less around the memory of classic games, and more the childhood memory of an industry in an age of innocence, when games were built in garages, an age untainted by greed or the corporate machine. Surely that's a memory worth hanging on to?



REALMS OF THE FORGOTTEN

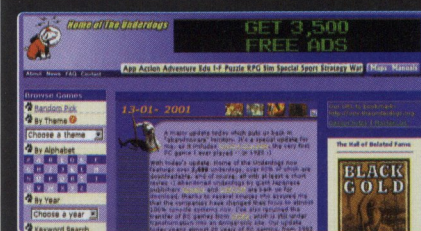
Here are some notable site's to start you on your journey into the lands of abandonware...



THE RING OF AGES

www.pheatsols.com

Run by PsOmA, the Ring of Ages is probably the most respected abandonware ring on the net - it's certainly the biggest. Links to a plethora of sites including abandonware, emulation and oldware.



HOME OF THE UNDERDOGS

www.theunderdogs.org

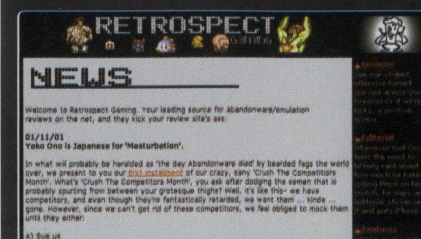
While not an abandonware site per se, Underdogs is beyond doubt one of the biggest and most popular within the community. The site contains game downloads, trivia, polls, reviews, instruction manuals and more.



THE GAMING DEPOT

www.gamingdepot.com

Huge is the only way to describe Gaming Depot. This site is home to one of the largest downloadable collections of abandonware on the internet, with 600+ games available for the grabbing. Oh, and it's also the host of...



RETROSPECT GAMING

retrospect.gamingdepot.com

Ostenisbly an abandonware review site, Retrospect has grown into more of an amalgamation between comedy, old games and *really* offensive words. Reviewing and linking to games from Gaming Depot, Retrospect is the only abandonware site of its kind and can be quite offensive. Be warned.

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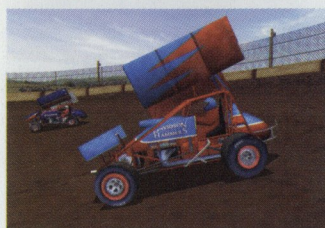
Welcome to Hell Month. Welcome to the drought, that terrible March-April nothingness marked "here be annual leave" on most release schedules. For the first time ever, the PCPP tech section outweighs the game reviews section. Of course, a lot of that is down to Hugh working hard and pulling all-nighters every Saturday, but at least some of it is due to the gaming drought of March-April.

Still on page 62, we've taken a look at the latest from Australian developer Ratbag, a little game called Dirt Track Racing: Sprint Cars. The Cars That Were Built to Tip Over, as my flatmate calls them.

And like a man in a desert sucking on a damp rag, Daniel seems permanently attached to a little game called Severance (page 66). He says it reminded him of Rune, but without the lizard-eating element. It's just the sort of thing you will need to tide you over until some major releases appear.

So we're a little light on the games this month. But next month, expect a lot of interesting stuff... although if I was to tell you which stuff to expect, it would probably get delayed, just to spite us. In the meantime, use these pages to find something cheerful, cheap and addictive, and hopefully by the time you're bored with it, something good will have been released.

anthonyf@next.com.au



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THE PCPP REVIEW SCORING SYSTEM

90+	Gold Award. A classic, everyone will love this game.
89-80	A strong title that's hard to fault. But perhaps not the best in its field.
79-60	Competent and playable. For fans of the genre.
59-40	Decidedly average, probably boring.
39-0	A dog. Bad, shamelessly unoriginal, cheap and horrible. Avoid.
Need	The minimum requirements to get the game running at a playable speed.
Want	The ideal system requirements for the game.
For	The major reasons why you'll like the reviewed game.
Against	The major reasons why you won't.

GAME OF THE MONTH COMPETITION!

Microsoft



Microsoft wants you to play Battle of Britain the way it was meant to be played. As such, we have been supplied with one Sidewinder Force Feedback 2 joystick to give away. Just answer this question for your chance to win!

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Write your answer on the back of an envelope, addressed to: **Microsoft Game of the Month, PC PowerPlay**, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern NSW 2016

PC PowerPlay

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DIRT TRACK RACING SPRINT CARS

It's not crap, it's great. No, really. Wait, come back!

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Ratbag

PUBLISHER

WizardWorks

DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of all Games

PRICE

\$49.95

RATING

G

NEED

Win95/98/Me
P-166
32Mb RAM
300Mb HDD
16MB Videocard
D3D

WANT

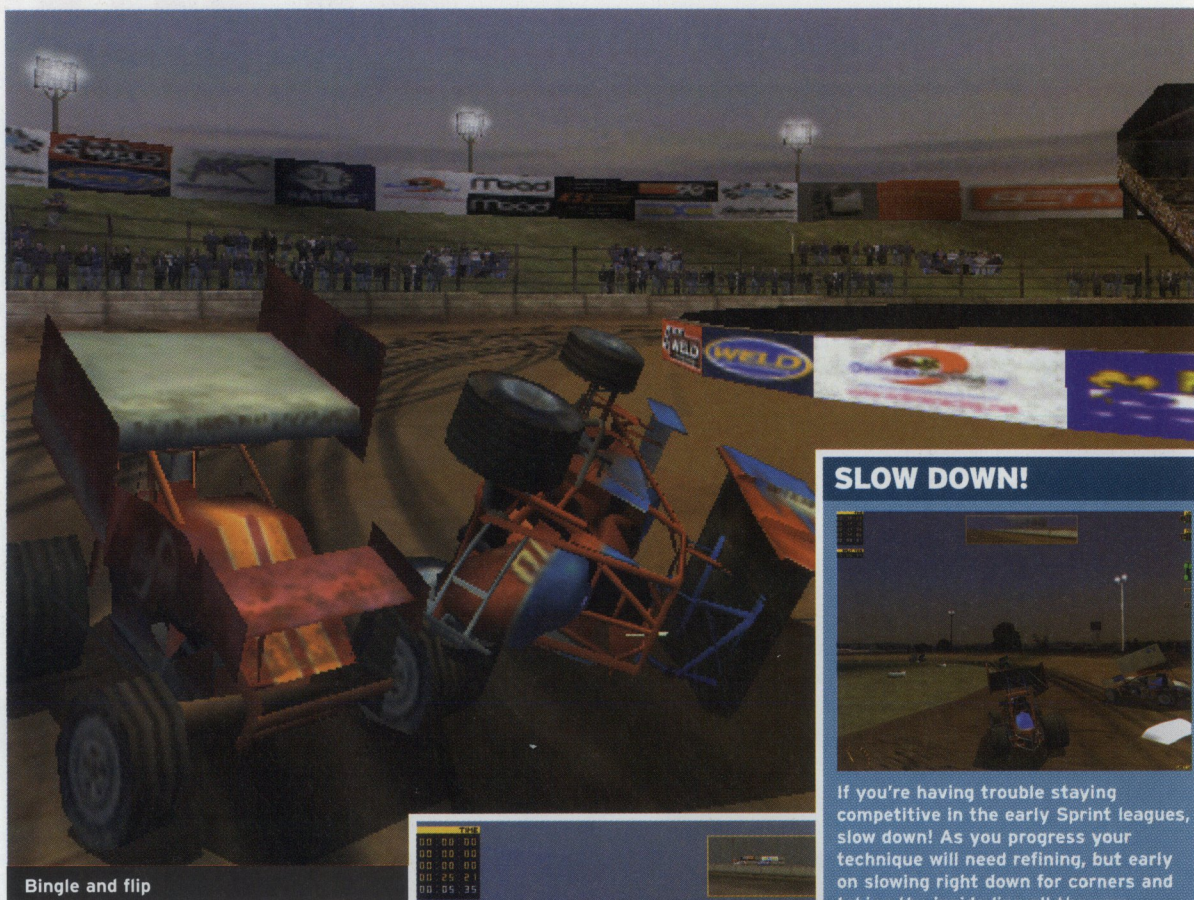
PII-450
128MB RAM
500MB HDD
32MB Videocard
Cable for multiplay

MULTIPLAYER

TCP/IP

AVAILABLE

Now



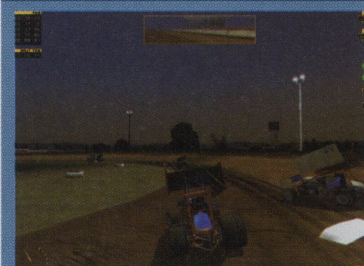
Bingle and flip

This game is published by WizardWorks, the Demtel of the gaming world. WizardWorks' line up isn't exactly what you would call top-tier, AAA material; Buck Masters Deer Hunting, Harley Davidson: Ride Across America, Carnivores, and, well, a bucketload of other crap that any self-respecting gamer wouldn't touch with a bargepole. Being published by WizardWorks probably doesn't inspire much confidence in the gaming populace. However, a publisher is just a publisher, when it comes down to it.

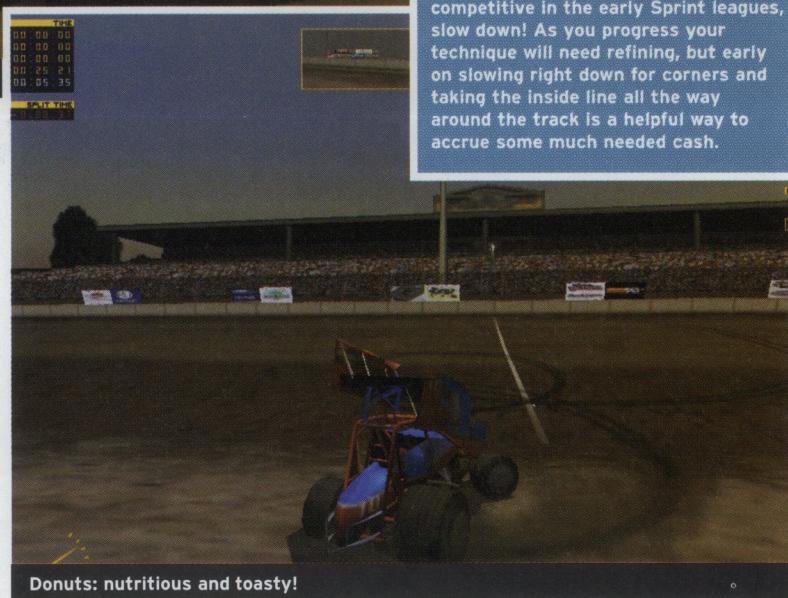
The double whammy is that DTR: Sprint Cars is, well, about dirt track racing. It's not a sport that has a huge following in our fair land, and is generally associated with the kind of American that thought Dukes of Hazzard was a documentary and would have eagerly voted Burt Reynolds for president if he promised to make another Smokey and the Bandit movie.

Then there's the content of the game itself. Isn't it just like NASCAR racing? You know, that silly type of racing where you just go round and round and round in an oval; turn left, straighten, drive straight, turn left, straighten, drive straight, turn left - and repeat ad nauseum.

SLOW DOWN!



If you're having trouble staying competitive in the early Sprint leagues, slow down! As you progress your technique will need refining, but early on slowing right down for corners and taking the inside line all the way around the track is a helpful way to accrue some much needed cash.



Donuts: nutritious and toasty!

Well, yes, Sprint Cars is published by WizardWorks, it is about an event that the worst kind of inbred seppo bumpkins are associated strongly with, and you do just go around and around an oval track over and over and over again. But it ROCKS!

Babbage's legacy

Australia's very own Ratbag is behind the game. Ratbag's hallmark is making excellent, realistic sims that are fun for

newbies and serious simmers alike. The same high level of professionalism and quality evident in the first Dirt Track Racing is once again on show here.

Driving sims live or die by the underlying engine of the game. Ratbag has used a refined version of the same 'difference' engine that has been used for all its games since Powerslide, and it's still one of the best there is for driving sims. No matter what vehicle is featured, as long as the

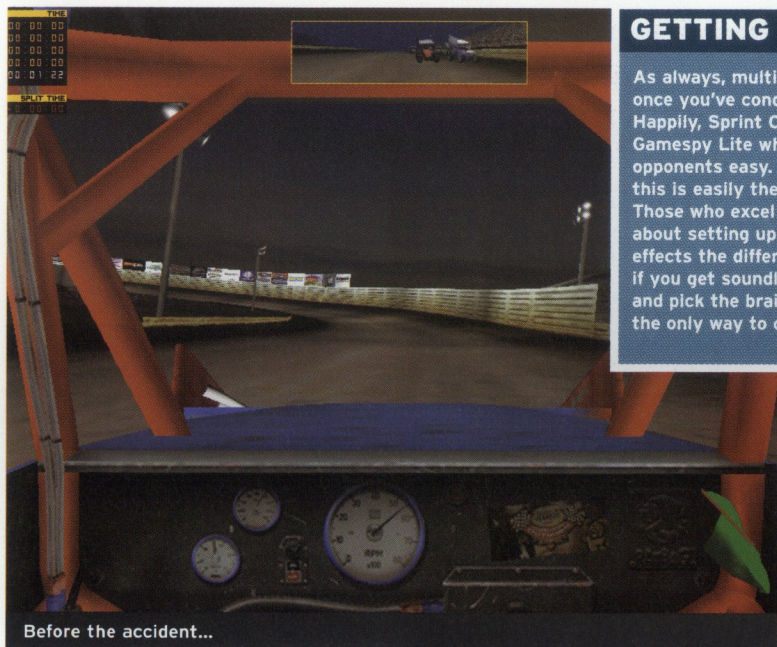
ONLINE

www.ratbaggames.com
The official home of Ratbag online



www.hoseheads.com
A real sprint car enthusiasts site, with a surprising amount of information about the Australian season. Apparently we're OK, but nowhere near the standard of the top yanks





Before the accident...

player gets a realistic and reasonable handling response then the backbone for a quality game is in place. Sprint Cars has an excellent backbone, and the rest of the game is of a similar quality.

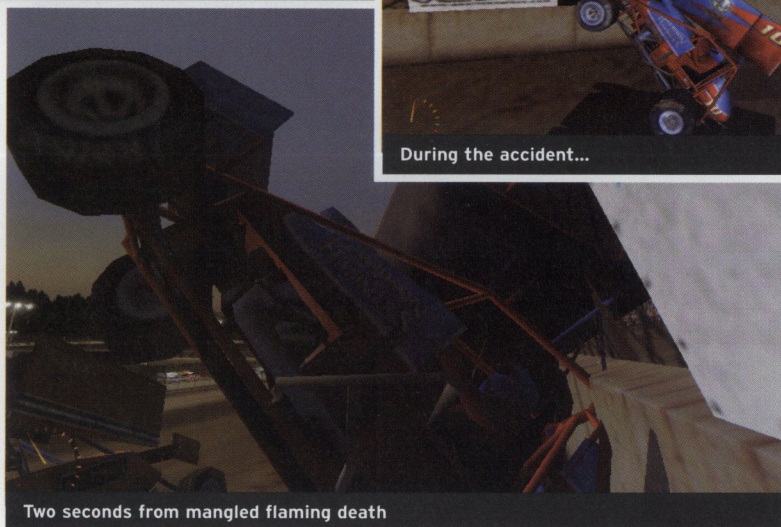
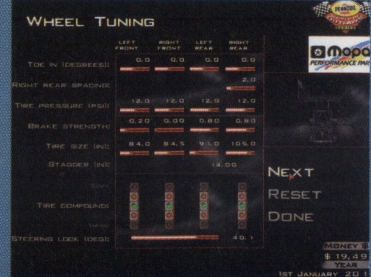
But when it comes down to it, you're still going around and around in circles - boring, right? Not at all. Driving a Sprint Car is an intricate and delicate experience, and requires a great deal of thought and planning. No, really. It just looks like a bunch of hooners turning left and screaming 'Yeehah!' at appropriate moments.

The tracks are small, the races are generally quite short, and there are twelve closely matched cars on a very thin track all vying for position. Top this off with an absolute beast of an engine coupled with a chassis about as heavy as your average fishing rod, very tight corners, an AI that's increasingly aggressive and not averse to bumping you out of the way, and that to compete effectively against them you have to spend most of your time in a controlled slide under full power - yes, this is a challenge indeed.

Cornering is, naturally, a huge part of the game - master the corners of a track and you're halfway to victory already. Each race contains qualifiers, heats and then the main event. If you qualify well you're not rewarded with the front of the grid for the heats, instead you get stuck at the back and have to battle your way through the hordes. And here's where the fun comes in - the game is engineered to reward skilful passing as much as skilful driving. There's a multitude of ways to take each corner: try and sneak through the underside and just feather the accelerator initially then power out, brake late and use your momentum to get into position, or try a full on powerslide around the outside to get the front position at the start, or anything in-between. Each corner in traffic presents the player with

GETTING YOUR TOE IN

As always, multiplayer is where you head once you've conquered singleplayer mode. Happily, Sprint Cars includes a copy of Gamespy Lite which makes finding opponents easy. If you're looking for help, this is easily the best place to go, too. Those who excel at multiplayer know a heap about setting up the cars properly and what effects the different options make. So even if you get soundly beaten, make sure to try and pick the brains of your conqueror, it's the only way to compete effectively.



another challenge requiring quick thinking, reflexes and a thoughtful approach (and lots of guts).

Stagger your toe-in

Ratbag has also included a raft of career options to keep the game interesting. Starting off with a measly ten grand, you need to purchase a low-end car, then jump into the crappiest competition with the crappiest prizemoney, gradually accumulating more money to repair and upgrade the car and eventually purchase a slightly better one. There are ten championships to take part in, though by around the middle things start getting very difficult. By this time you're probably equipped with the best car, fully optioned, so it's down to your skill and knowledge of fine-tuning. And it's in the tuning section where a few minor quibbles come to the fore. Unless you're a serious gear-head, the tuning options can be quite mystifying; what the hell is a toe-in, and should I increase my stagger or not? There's no helpful diagram to explain what the changes mean - you

either know already or just try things through trial and error until you get something right.

You will need to learn how to tune your car appropriately for multiplayer, too. I thought my skill level was quite good until I went for a race online, but these guys know how to drive, they know how to tune their cars, and it's a very competitive environment. Expect to be humbled at first - but these are the kind of people that will know what a stagger is, and if you ask nicely enough they might even help you out. The multiplayer code is stable and works well, but a 56k connection will really only cope with a low-ping single human opponent; for the all-in vroom-fests you'll need cable or ADSL (or a LAN party).

Sprint Cars is easily one of the most demanding yet entertaining racing sims in ages. Don't be put off by the allegedly repetitious nature of the races, or the stigma of the inbred yokel fanbase. Give it a try - you'll have a whale of a time, even if you don't like racing.

Gareth Jones

PCPP

FOR

- Excellent physics and driver AI
- Very playable
- Fun but realistic

AGAINST

- Mediocre audio
- Annoying announcer
- Confusing car setup section

OVERALL

A rip-roaring ride that's cheap and will reward any kind of player

87%

SIM COASTER

Bullfrog takes us for another ride. Hmm...

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Bullfrog

PUBLISHER

Electronic Arts

DISTRIBUTOR

Electronic Arts

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

G

NEED

Win 95/98/ME

P233 MMX

32MB RAM

4x CD ROM

415 MB HD

4MB videocard

WANT

PIII 450

64MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER

No

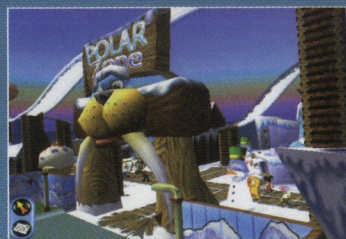
AVAILABLE

Now

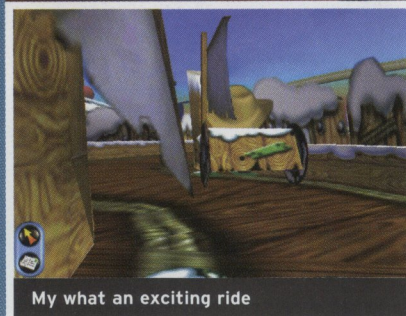


It's coaster-tastic!

RIDE THE RIDES!



The greatest drawcard for the Theme Park games has always been the ability to ride the attractions (something promised for the original but not delivered). Here's the view from a spinning ride. Ooh please, pass the bag...



My what an exciting ride

ONLINE

www.eagames.ea.com
Noooo!



www.worldofcoasters.com
Rollercoasters, not drink coasters



In preparation for the review of Simcoaster, I decided to do some online research. While I found plenty of sites with details of all the parks around the world and patrons rating the rides and such, it all began to blur soothingly before my very eyes. Until I found some of the more grisly sites dedicated to the accidents that occur around the world (not too frequently mind) in amusement parks. Take one poor sod who tried to avoid paying the entrance fee to Disneyland, by climbing into the park via a pillar that supported a popular ride. Subsequently he became entangled in the ride and made an awful mess up there.

All of this got me thinking that park management games don't simulate nearly enough of what happens in amusement parks. Especially when they are as mercilessly nice as Sim Coaster. At least in Roller Coaster Tycoon (RCT) you could drown your nuisance guests and people died in

accidents. Hell, even the boss of the company in Sim Coaster is nice. The tedium experienced by many gamers with management style games could easily be allayed by the inclusion of brutal, sad, everyday violence. Perhaps this is one of the reasons, this game will not be the game of the year, anywhere in the world.

Sim Coaster sees you don the manager's cap of an amusement park (or parks). The goal is to run a successful Theme Park, i.e. make money on the premises by building rides, getting customers in and sucking the dollars out of their pockets. If you do

enough of this, you will be promoted to run better parks, your shares in the park will skyrocket and you will be a very wealthy, happy, little automaton (For my lecture on the evils of money, see "Never ride the Big Dipper again").

Watching vomit

Ideology aside, this is a definite direction towards structure when compared to the much more free-form nature of Theme Park World (TPW). In that game, you collected Gold Tickets to buy special rides, and opened new parks. None of that malarky

NEVER RIDE THE BIG DIPPER AGAIN

Sydney's Luna Park is back in action but its famous rollercoaster, The Big Dipper, is not. It is being torn down thanks to the efforts of local residents and Harry Seidler, the architect responsible for such Sydney buildings as Australia Square, the MLC Building and the abominable Blues Point Tower. He has now robbed Sydney of a great treasure, its only big rollercoaster. Cheers Mr Seidler, you've shown us that with power and influence, there's nothing that one man can't destroy - no matter how valuable it is to the people of Sydney (or at least, to John - Ed).



Kids' holiday wonderlands: garish

here, you need to complete specific objectives to obtain advancement through the three parks: World of Invention, Polar Zone and Arabian Nights. The objectives are fairly stock standard - sell more drinks, get more people in, keep your workers happy, improve profits.

In SimCoaster, you're not so much a park manager as a wet nurse. The little talking ball, this time an American woman and not a Scottish teet, coos helpful instructions. In

received virtually no facelift and the wrinkles are showing - it looks dated.

A bonus though, is the shift to the original Theme Park's emphasis on management. There's a lot more to do than in TPW, where you mostly stood around watching the vomit grow. The pace seems a little daunting at times but at least you're kept busy - a simple and sure way to keep the player involved. This is SimCoaster's trump because I played this game for

In SimCoaster, you're not so much a park manager as a wet nurse

fact, you barely need to think for yourself, because the minute a problem arises, there she is informing you of the best course of action. Thankfully the little ball can be muted, as PCPP was informed by one astute reader (freakin know-it-all...).

What this all boils down to is another game where you build things to gain approval from people who don't exist... Not that there's anything wrong with that. There's lots you can build - much of it you have seen already if you have played TPW. Speaking of seen already, the game has

hours despite its obvious flaws. It is absolutely playable.

Regardless, it would have been nice to see the emphasis on detail extended to other areas of the game. A difficulty option would have helped (in monetary terms, the game is very easy). Control over staff leaves a little to be desired; some more interaction between the various staff would have been good. The accessibility of information is a problem especially compared to the major rival RCT (menus cannot remain open together which means a lot of closing



Warning! Too much fairy floss will make you blurry

windows and opening them...). This is probably due to the "simple is sweet" angle of the game, but in a perfect world I would have my wishes.

SimCoaster comes seeking the glory of RollerCoaster Tycoon, which is ironic, since RCT was largely a remake of Bullfrog's original, Theme Park. Yet, sadly there's no more of an emphasis on actual rollercoasters in this game than in TPW. As such, SimCoaster is really TPW version 2.0. Using the same engine and featuring (somewhat) more challenging and hands-on approach, it is a fun game with a good amount of replay value. But it's hardly a new game and it's not much more than an upgrade. Seen in this light, it's less than dazzling. However, if you missed the original TPW, then this is a worthwhile purchase.

John Dewhurst

PCPP

FOR

- Management focus
- Challenging
- No Scottish blob

AGAINST

- More of the same
- Strange interface
- Often too easy

OVERALL

Good coaster manager but lacking in freshness

79%

SEVERANCE BLADE OF

Even without the lizard-eating, this is as good as Rune

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Rebel Act

PUBLISHER

Codemasters

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

PRICE

\$79.95

RATING

MA 15+

NEED

Win95/98/Me
PII-400
64MB RAM
8MB Videocard

WANT

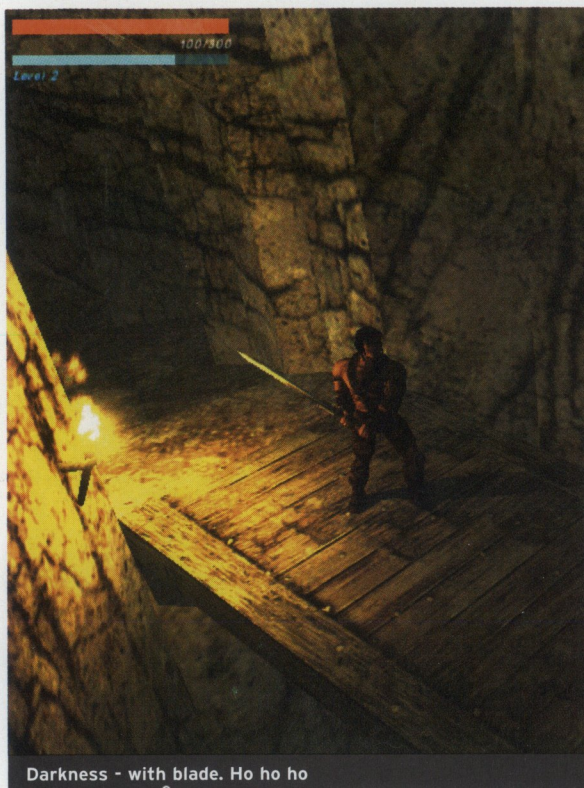
PIII-600
128MB RAM
32MB Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

TBA

AVAILABLE

Now

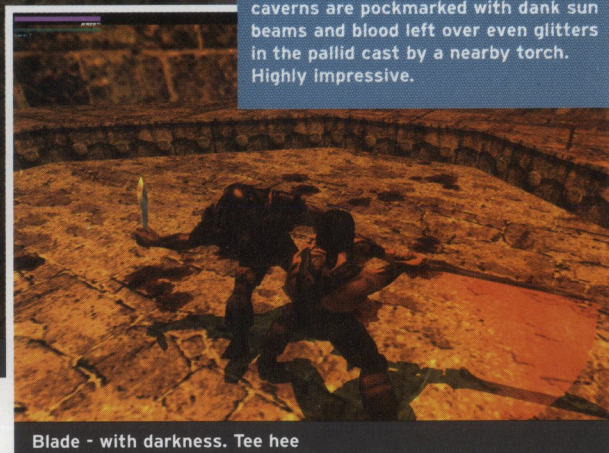


Darkness - with blade. Ho ho ho

GLITTER AND SHINE



One of the most aesthetically pleasing aspects of Severance is undoubtedly the spectacular lighting effects the game has on offer. Shadows playfully dance from wall to floor by fire light, caverns are pockmarked with dank sun beams and blood left over even glitters in the pallid cast by a nearby torch. Highly impressive.



Blade - with darkness. Tee hee

At the risk of nullifying the rest of this review, *Severance: Blade of Darkness* can be summed up with a precise (if mathematically spurious) equation that can be scrawled on the hand for easy reference when at a local software retailer. In the future, this equation - this wonderful formula - will be heralded by gamers worldwide as the beginning of a revolution in game reviews that was reached only after long periods of goatee stroking and saying 'Hmmm' a lot while tapping forefinger on wooden desk.

What is this wonder that so succinctly sums up an entire game in a few words? This: *Diablo* + *Rune* x *Braveheart* = *Severance*. Oh, and for accuracy's sake, divide the outcome by 10% Oni.

You little bleeder

Still reading? Hmm. Not formulaically inclined, huh? Oh well, for those who don't consider math a strong suit or simply believe that the above could be an elaborated on a little, here goes: *Severance* is good, but not excellent.

The plot, for what it's worth, revolves around a blade that is, you know, full of darkness and stuff that the player must recover for the... uh... good of the earth.

Or something.

Hell, it's not like it matters, because

the only plot that has any sort of bearing on the game itself can be described with the line: "Hey, you... *WHACK*! Oh! My face! It bleeds!" *Severance* isn't a game heavy on the narrative. This is a good thing, because story would just end up getting in the way of all the bloodletting and sword swinging - of which there is plenty.

With an obvious small-scale melee combat focus, *Severance's* battle system is an interesting one... and also happens to be annoying and fiddly. Basically, the way it works is that when an enemy is sighted, the player must 'lock on' to it by pressing tab. When this is done, your character will then focus solely on the target and the controls

The whole concept of 'locking on', then, seems to be rather superfluous and ends up being gratingly aggravating. See, if one doesn't lock on a target, one can still fight but without being able to strafe. If one does lock on, then there's the whole problem of your character only concentrating on one enemy, thus allowing him or her to be chopped up with gleeful abandon by the remaining villains. This, as you might expect, is extremely annoying. There is really no other word for it. Except for the obvious one to be directed at developer Rebel Act: why?

Or, as I'm sure most of you will exclaim when actually playing the game, "R&S!@&S"

the fetid, Dragon's Lair-smelling pit of the nice-looking-but-stupidly-aggravating

switch from the standard free-form to the combat mode, allowing the player to, basically, circle strafe and... that's it. Everything else - hitting, blocking, dodging and the like - can be done without using the lock on feature and with more ease to boot.

why?!" Why bother with the lock-on feature? Why not just allow the player to strafe at any time? Why not make use of the traditional mouse-keyboard combination more than adequately demonstrated by *FAKK2*, *Rune*, etc?

ONLINE

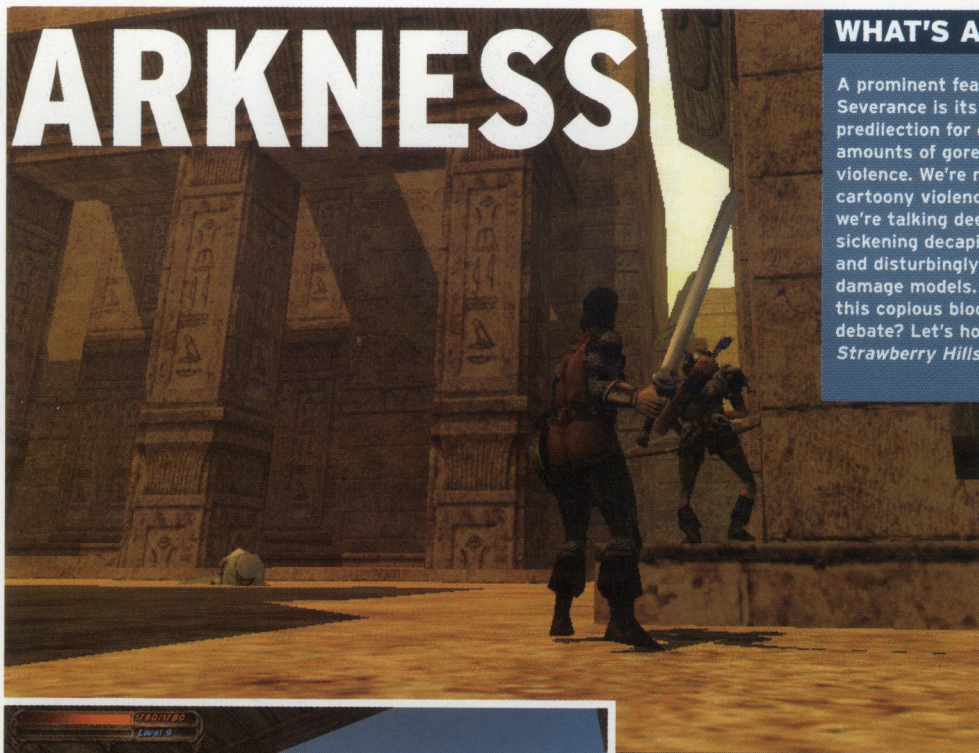
www.codemasters.com
Portal to the official
Severance page



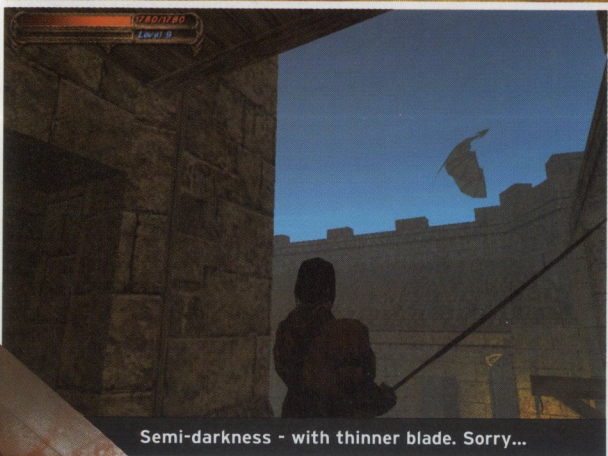
www.rebelact.com
Just try and guess
what this is... go on,
I dare you to



DARKNESS



Two blades + darkness



Semi-darkness - with thinner blade. Sorry...

WHAT'S A LIMB BETWEEN FRIENDS?

A prominent feature of *Severance* is its noticeable predilection for gratuitous amounts of gore and violence. We're not talking cartoony violence either; we're talking deep cuts, sickening decapitations and disturbingly realistic damage models. Will all this copious blood ignite the slumbering 'violence in games' debate? Let's hope not. (We're not going back to the *Strawberry Hills* - Ed)



No darkness whatsoever - but still a blade!

Drunk uncle

Combat can be - and frequently is - very fun once one has come to grips with the frustrating controls, but it could have been so much better if they allowed more freedom. The camera can also be irritating too; when

batting in confined spaces, it zooms in and out repeatedly thus rendering skirmishing difficult. It's hard to concentrate on the action when it looks as if you're watching a drunken uncle film it at a family gathering.

With all this scathing criticism, one would be forgiven for assuming that *Severance* is a poor game. It isn't. What saves *Severance* from the fetid, Dragon's-Lair-smelling pit of the nice-looking -but-stupidly-aggravating is the fact that, as mentioned above, fighting is quite enjoyable.

Ranging from frenzied, bum-rushing bloodbaths to a languid pulling of a bow string ending in the sweet 'thok' of an embedded arrow, combat varies accordingly from character to character. The game is a genuinely different experience each time a new choice of hero is made.

All protagonists start off in a different predicament, following different paths and using different means to attain their goals. This engenders the sense that there really are four unique games to be played, providing a good incentive to keep playing continuously. Stuck with and sick of the barbarian? Oh well,

play with the amazon for a drastic change of pace. Tired of the bearded antics of the dwarf? (*Never!* - Ed.) Well, maybe the austere, sword swinging knight will quell your burgeoning frustration. It's all about variety, baby.

The old ultra-violence

The graphics, you'll notice, are quality and complement the game entirely. Aside from the camera, *Severance* is a technical class act all the way. There's nothing more lovely than a gratuitous, gushing fountain of wine-coloured liquid spraying from the headless neck of a recently fallen, 3D rendered foe. And getting to bash enemies with the limbs of their dead compatriots? Genius. What can be more satisfying than hearing the excellently crafted, studio screams of an enemy reverberating off beautifully constructed medieval walls while he is being bashed to death by the leg of his deceased friend? Very little, I dare say.

One thing worth mentioning before this review is brought to a close is the lack of save game options. *Severance* will not allow you to save when you deem it necessary and this, it is arguable, is an oversight on behalf of Rebel Act. Compounding the issue, the game is linear - precisely the reason that a save option should've been included. Who likes to do the same, simple thing over and over again with very little room for digression? If it was possible to do missions a little differently each time, great, maybe it wouldn't be such a problem. But it is. The same. Every. Bloody. Time.

Severance is not quite of the highest calibre. Indeed, a great looking, playable game has sadly been hindered by largely superfluous controls and several glaring oversights on behalf of the developer.

Daniel Staines

PCPP

FOR

- Fast paced
- Gorgeous looking
- Sword swingin'

AGAINST

- Fiddly to control
- No whim saving
- Bad camera control

OVERALL

A great game marred by impermissible flaws

80%

EVERQUEST SCARS OF VELIOUS

At least it keeps them off the streets

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Verant Interactive

PUBLISHER
Sony

DISTRIBUTOR
Ubisoft

PRICE
\$49.95

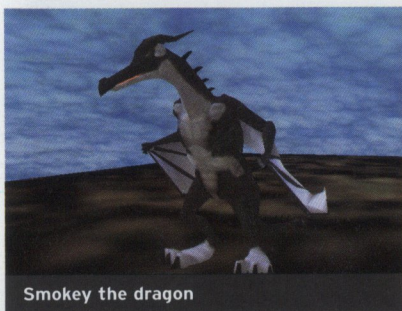
RATING
M

NEED
P-200
64MB RAM
TCP/IP connection

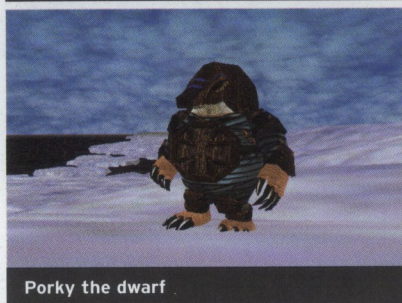
WANT
Duron 700
128MB RAM
16MB videocard
D3D
Cable Internet

MULTIPLAYER
Online only

AVAILABLE
Now



Smokey the dragon

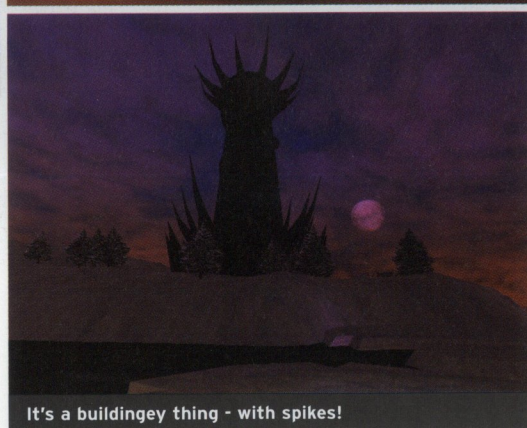


Porky the dwarf

There is only one place on Earth where capes are always in fashion, and that's in Everquest. Try as I might I just can't bring back the cape on my own. I wear them to Australian fashion weeks, The Givenchy collections in Milan. Even to gala openings in Kate Fischer's trousers, but all to no avail. Hence I slink back to Norrath where a boy can be at one with his cape, never once feeling the barbs of uncharitable comments and ignorant opinions.

The Scars of Velious, and its attendant cape-wearing possibilities, is an expansion for the long established online RPG world of Everquest. The original game has been around for roughly the same time as Ultima Online. It began with only a fraction of the hype and has managed to survive the years of changing tastes and hardware, and it's now in better shape than ever.

Much of this success is due to Sony and the resources committed to the project since buying Verant Software, at least partly as a way to learn the skills to develop online games for the PS2. Everquest is continually expanding and being refined. Almost everyday brings some little patch or other to add to the game and as a result Everquest has outgrown Ultima Online as the best online RPG experience around.



It's a buildingey thing - with spikes!

Bongo the clown

In other words, if you are new to the game, you won't have to worry about Velious for quite a while. It usually takes around four months of regular playing to get a character to around 30th level and by then you are probably ready for a new and bigger challenge.

ONLINE

www.planetequest.com
All the resources, guides and info you'll need!



www.scarred.com
Latex and rubber clothing! Stretch your imagination, says the site. We couldn't agree more!



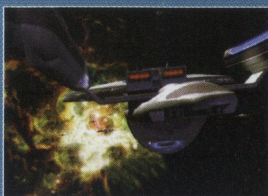
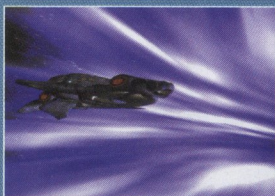
as a result, Everquest has outgrown Ultima Online as the best online RPG experience

Level thirty

Everquest: Scars of Velious is much more than just a patch though; it's the second major expansion of the Everquest world after The Ruins of Kunark and adds a host of new locations, quests, items and situations to the game. It is also a very specialised add-on, designed for those players who have been around for a while and reached at least 30th level with one of their characters. Indeed unless you are at least 30th level you cannot even go to Velious as it would be too difficult to survive there.

Apart from the obvious - tougher monsters, better items, skimpier fur lined G-Strings and new dungeons/ruins - Velious still has much to offer. Guild affiliations - more accurately, factions - are much more important in Velious than in any other part of Everquest and demarcation lines between territories are an important thing to keep in mind, particularly if you die in enemy territory. You may find it hard to get back to your corpse or you will have to pay someone to drag it back to your territory, as the locals will consider it 'aiding the enemy'.

PK IS AOK



Player Killing is something that turns many gamers away from online RPGs like Diablo II as it tends to make things hard on new, unestablished players. Everquest handles this problem better than any other RPG by setting aside two dedicated servers for PvP action. One of these is an every man/dwarf/troll/Liberal frontbencher for himself affair while the other works off a Guild loyalty system where players can only kill those from other guilds. Mass warfare!



Mitzy the tiger

Zone boundaries

Rogues and Bards, who always had the ability to disarm traps, have now gained the ability to sense them as well. These classes have always, supposedly, had these abilities but until now they've been unimplemented. Many players would have ignored training in these disciplines as a result and so to make up for this, Bards and Rogues now have the ability to gain skill without training once they have reached the appropriate level and have crossed a zone boundary. Zones being the different geographical regions in Everquest.

These skills can be used properly now within Velious. There are traps ranging from scrote-pinching annoying to damn bastardly. They are invisible and are detected and disarmed by Rogues and Bards.

Dragon Circles are another new feature in Velious. They can be found in the Iceclad Ocean, the Great Divide, the Wakening Lands, and Cobalt Scar. These dragon circles are teleport locations for the wizard and druid teleports into Velious.



Poo-poo the faun

They're not like any other Teleports in Everquest though. In order for a wizard or druid to teleport you to the area, you must have in your inventory a 'tooth' from the appropriate or 'higher level' dragon circle. In other words you have to find them first on foot before you can zap straight to them.

Some of the best features though have nothing to do with the actual land of Velious, they have to do with updates to the Everquest interface. Previously when looting, trading, or viewing your inventory, the display would switch to 640x480 mode. Now, if you are in resolutions above 640x480, all functions take place in the higher resolution mode. The User Interface features new



Bob the dead thing in the middle of nowhere

options and screens that allow players to remain in the 'Full Screen' video mode when playing the game, rather than switching to the lower resolution 'Overlay' mode.

Windows can also now be moved around however you like by clicking on the upper left corner of each, moving it to a location of your preference, and clicking again to set it into place. This option is also set on a 'per-resolution' basis, so you can have different window positions for each resolution. Neat.

Everquest players, if they plan on being Everquest players for long, should definitely take a look at Velious for their high level characters, and at \$49.95 it's priced sensibly. There will also be a total package with all the Everquest add-ons in one box if you want to try it out for the first time, and if my negotiations go well it will also include a cape for your gaming and social enjoyment.

George Soropos

PCPP

FOR

- Great expansion
- Improves the Everquest interface
- Addresses issues

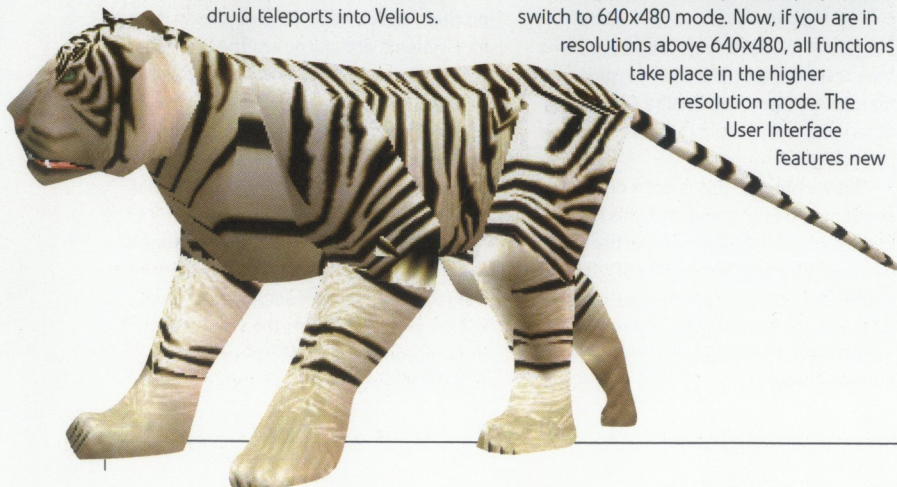
AGAINST

- 30th level players only
- Needs balancing

OVERALL

Breathes new life into Everquest for experiences players looking for new horizons to explore

85%



STARFLEET COMMAND 2 EMPIRES AT WAR

Again we boldly go where several games have gone before

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Taldren

PUBLISHER

Interplay

DISTRIBUTOR

Interplay

PRICE

\$79.95

RATING

GB+

NEED

Win95/98/Me
PII-350
64MB RAM
8MB Videocard
D3D

WANT

Athlon 1GHz
128MB RAM
32MB Videocard

MULTIPLAYER

Maybe

AVAILABLE

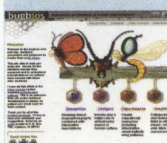
Now

ONLINE

www.starfleetuniverse.com
Best SFC resource with a mass of mods and missions for the first game, and hopefully soon for the second...

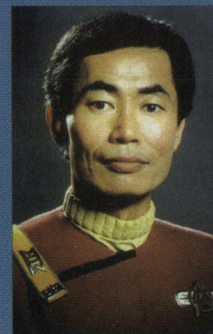


www.bugblos.com
An excellent site on insects to look at...



TAKEI BOLDLY GOES...

The high point in the game comes at the beginning, during the intro in fact when George Takei lends his sonorous vocal chords to the voiceover. Then it's all down hill after that I'm afraid.



Allemande left



Set phasers to 'bugged'

"Stardate 2275.13 The Captain has been very anxious since we left conference on Eroticon 6. I've heard that one of the delegates whipped off his toupe in mid speech, mistakenly thinking it was a savage Grbwzxyzl, and ate it. Apparently Grbwzxyzls are quite a delicacy in some parts of the Galaxy. The captain grows restless so I must finish this report with one final point. It is imperative that we obtain more note pads at our next Starbase visit as room on the Captain's log is quickly running out. Some ball points would also be appreciated, particularly by the Captain, as quill tips make him rather irritable."

captain bravely given so many orders to pick up his pen. And never before has Starfleet witnessed such bravery as Kirk's sexy crew charges into the fray, picking up the captain's pen with all the skill and determination that only Starfleet training can bring.

But we digress, this is not a discussion about methods of command, this is a tactical evaluation of a new Starfleet training program. The original SFC hit the world stage like a whale doing a swan dive off the World Trade Center: quite noticeable but very messy. It required three patches and seven Hail Mary's in order to function

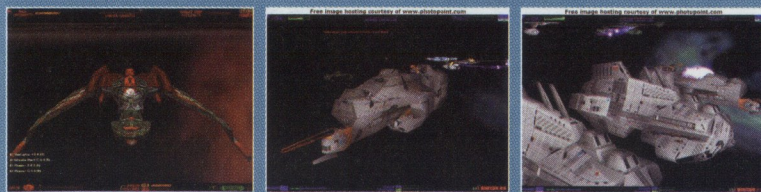
properly, but once the mod community took it to heart they eventually transformed it into a respectable combat simulator.

A year has passed, the Borg threat has diminished. But elsewhere things have changed, threats grown worse and a need for a better, more effective training simulator has arisen.

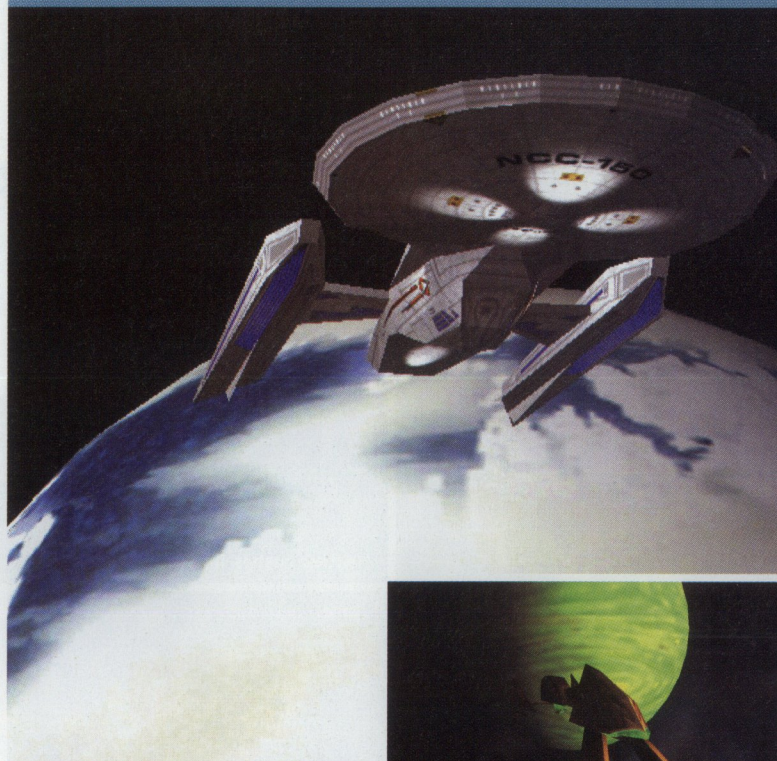
However our mortal enemy has tricked us. The Romulans have infected our new program with a nano virus rendering it inert for all intents and purposes. The bugs are endless: training bugs that make vessels behave unnaturally, bugs that swap the states of pause and run so that the game only plays with the word 'PAUSE' in the middle of the screen, and the ever-popular random crash to Windows.

But the Grand High Wizard of all bugs is the dreaded 'slow down' bug. The longer you train the more the simulator slows until, before you are even one third of the way through your adventure, it becomes unplayable and must be restarted.

MOD IT SO?



One of the strengths of the Starfleet Command series is its modability. SFC 2 even includes the developer's own mission design API to allow players to make their own missions and campaigns. However, the most spectacular mods come in the form of new ships. Whether you're a Star Wars, B5 or even Battlestar Galactica fan there are ships around to suit your taste. Even Homeworld gets a new lease of life in SFC land. Ships from other eras of the Trek franchise are also around - Next Gen's Enterprise and the ships from DS9, for example.



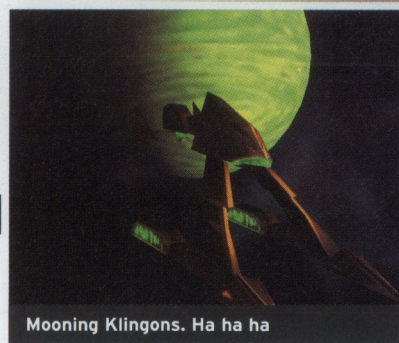
Planet earth is near...

Treachery

Some unpleasant changes have also been made to the original specification. The training of crews is no longer supported; your crews are now made up of Series 4000 mechanoids. The vessel library is now also a shadow of its former self with no text descriptions of ships and limited access from the in-game menu.

There are two new races to try your skills against, the Mirak and the slimy Interstellar Concordium. However only a limited number of campaigns are available, less than in the original simulator. There appear to be many campaigns but they are mostly the same, with different races as the combatants.

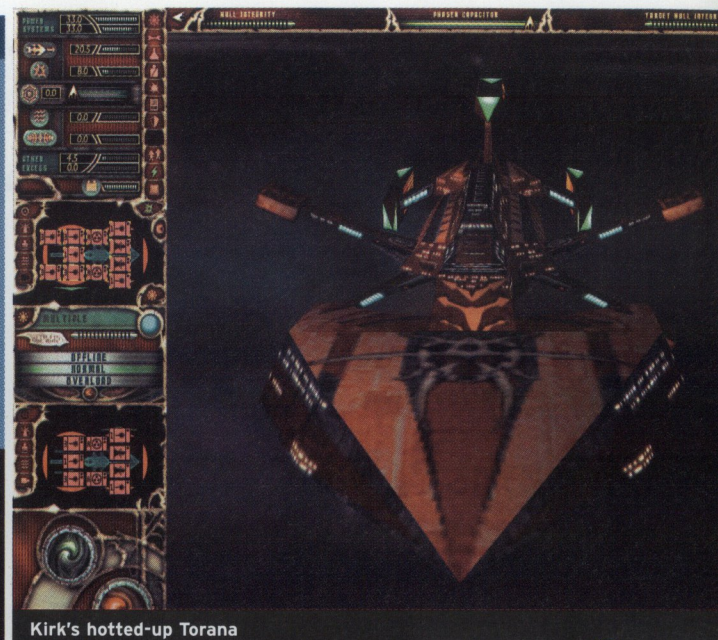
Another act of treachery has been discovered in the Dynaverse II online game world. It doesn't exist. As of writing the promised online campaign has yet to appear in any form and may indeed have been sucked through a wormhole into the fifth dimension, the mythical place where 8-bit console games go to die.



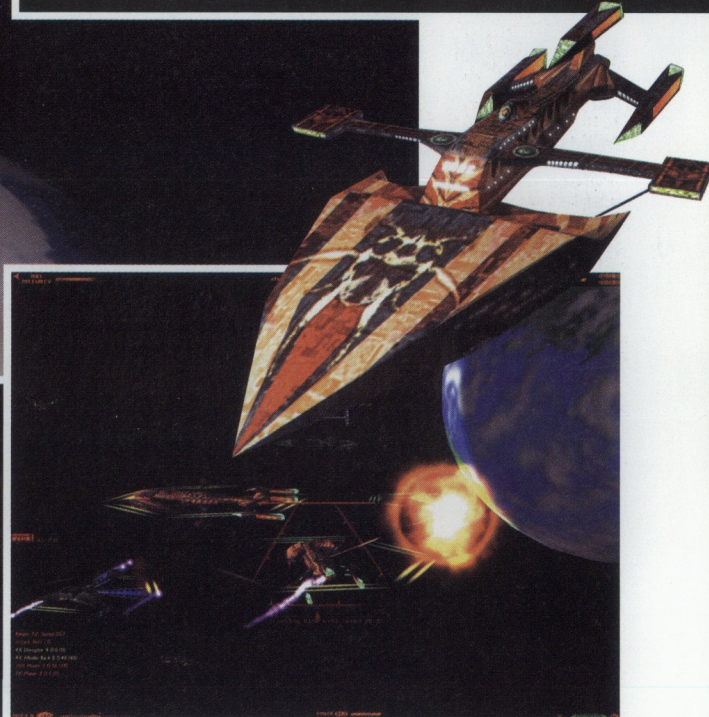
Mooning Klingons. Ha ha ha

Balance is an important aspect of the universe, which is probably why SFC2 isn't very. Balanced, that is. Victory in singleplayer campaign missions awards the same points regardless of your ship types. The points are used to restock your vessels and buy new ones and while an award of 300 points is suitable when you have a Frigate, it is patently silly when you have three Heavy Cruisers each of which carry 300 points worth of missiles! In other words it is very difficult, nigh on impossible in fact, to maintain a strong fleet. Infamy! Those Romulans will pay.

While the situation may seem irretrievably lost there may be some small hope on the horizon. Two attempts have already been made to thwart the bugs in patches 2.0.0.3 and 2.0.0.4 to no avail but a stronger cure is apparently on the way in the



Kirk's hotted-up Torana



form of patch 2.0.0.6 (2.0.0.5 was compromised by Romulan agents). The Dynaverse II online campaign is also in the final stages of testing and hopefully both of these will soon be available, improving things considerably.

Another plus is the fact that the mission design API has been included in the package and hopefully our new simulator will be taken to heart by mod makers and mission designers making it better and longer lived. And bug free.

If the two updates had been available the score for SFC2 may have been higher but perhaps also Interplay should have placed an informational sticker on the game packaging "WARNING: This game will not be playable until Britney Spears wins the Nobel Prize for Literature"

George Soropos

PCPP

FOR

- Shipboard features
- Good manual
- Take's voice

AGAINST

- Slowdown bug
- Pause bug
- Misc. bugs

OVERALL

Lots of Enterprising action, but much too buggy

55%

BLAIR WITCH PROJECTS

Not as nearly as crap as you might expect

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Terminal Reality/
Human Head/Ritual

PUBLISHER

Gathering of
Developers

DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of all Games

PRICE

\$49.95 each

RATING

MA 15+

NEED

Win95/98/Me
PII-233
32MB RAM

WANT

Win98 SE
PIII-500
128MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER

No

AVAILABLE

Now

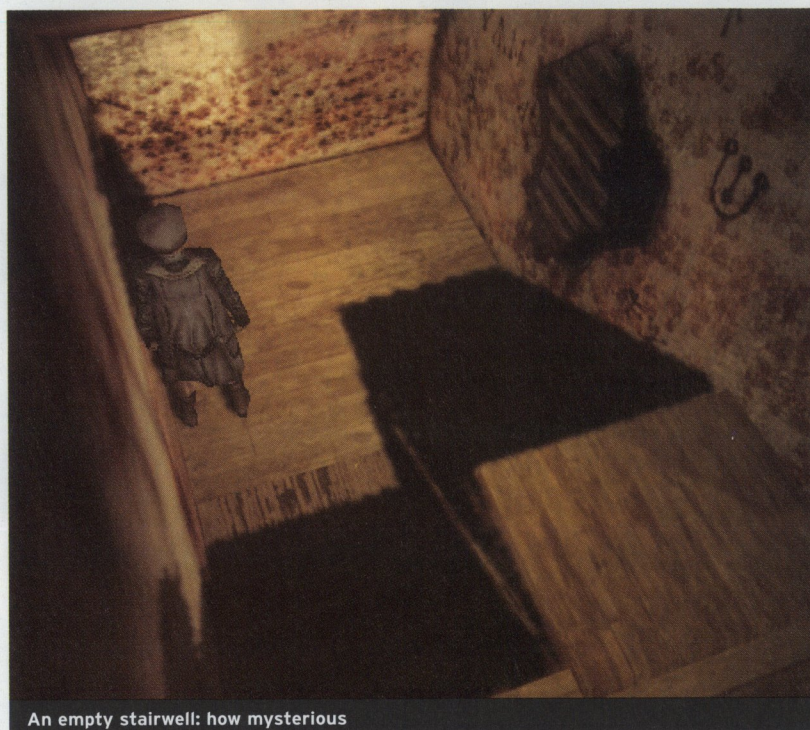
The Gathering of Developers had a clever plan. The Blair Witch licence had been bought from Hexan films and it was time to start getting product out there. The decision was made that the excellent Nocturne engine would be used to run the games, while three crack teams of designers - Terminal Reality, Human Head and Ritual - were bought in to each tailor an episode set in the woods and dales of Burkitsville, Maryland.

Nocturne was reviewed in PCPP#46. It was a damn fine engine, but didn't score nearly as highly as it should mainly due to its long and slightly dull missions. However, the gameplay, use of light and shadow, the extensive mission backgrounds, and the fantastic auto-aim and two-handed fighting were exceptional. Given all this, it was a shame that Nocturne rather fell by the wayside. However, with Blair Witch, its redemption is complete and those features have been

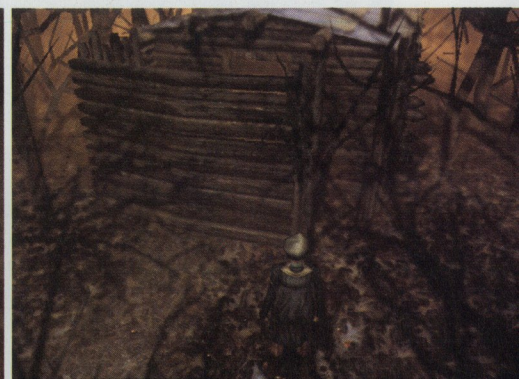
lovingly rubbed bright till you can see your face in it (*Even if you're hideously mutated - Ed*).

As a quick side note, viewing of the film is not mandatory and may even be detrimental to your enjoyment. If you liked the film, fine, if you're like me and thought it amateur dreck, then you may view the project with a certain amount of cynicism. Thankfully, this ain't three horrid Americans dying in the wood. The teams wisely chose to focus on three time periods.

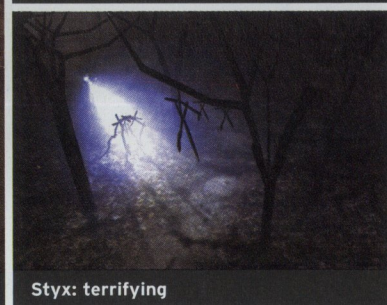
Christian Read



An empty stairwell: how mysterious



Heather rushes for the loo



Styx: terrifying

VOLUME 1 RUSTIN PARR

Volume 1 is set immediately after Rustin Parr has murdered several children in a shack up in the woods. After the horrible deed is done he calmly turns himself in. Now, the cooler than Lara, scientist-adventurer, Doc Holliday has been sent in by the ultra-secret Spookhouse organisation to investigate what really went down.

It's evident here there is something very exciting going on at Terminal Reality, and for my money there is no better group of designers working in the thirdperson field today. Volume 1 fulfils the promise of Nocturne admirably, being suspenseful, scary, interesting and just plain satisfying gaming. The game is a model of excellence, beautifully designed and supremely animated.

It's the details that really capture the attention. Clothes and hair are blown in the breeze, while the walking animation is superb. Creatures leap and caper and gibber with a sinister reality that is always unnerving, and you'll find yourself panicking at the sounds of crashing glass and monstrous footsteps. The forest design is absolutely breathtaking, so much so I'd like to bestow it with the honour of the best ever forest.

Camera angles, although cinematically pleasing, were a bit of a nightmare in Nocturne. Here this has been pretty much stripped away with less of an emphasis on close-quarters fighting and

more on free-roaming battles. Though the combat is still complex and difficult, thanks in large part to the distinct lack of bullets.

The puzzle aspects make Volume 1 more of an adventure game than the other two. There's nothing too complex, but it's still a challenge. The only real problem is a trial-and-error puzzle that involves a tape recording. There's nothing else to do but experiment and play around blindly

with bass and treble levels until it's solved. In sum, Rustin Parr is really an excellent game. It's definitely one of the best horror/action games that is available today.



PCPP

OVERALL

Extra Spooky and well plotted. Bit difficult & complex

85%

VOLUME 2 COFFIN ROCK

Volume 2, *Coffin Rock*, fills in the story of what happened at the eponymous site of infamy. Five men went searching for a girl in the woods. Later, they were found eviscerated on the broad flat stone. But unbeknownst to local lore a man with no memory named Lazarus was with them, a Civil War soldier with no past, out of time and beset by various demons. Lazarus is saved from his dreadful wounds by young Robin Weaver. When Robin is kidnapped to serve the pleasure of the Witch, Lazarus must enter the forest working with five other men, all the while fighting the spectres of soldiers and past prey.

The soldier's tale takes place twice over. Firstly, he plays out the events that lead to his memories being torn from him. Somewhere, he encountered the malevolent force in the forest. While seeking his saviour he also must recover those memories.

Coffin Rock suffers from comparisons to *Rustin Parr*. Simply put, the game plays out straightforwardly without much to do aside from run around a forest and shoot things. Sure there's a long plot and a lot of back history, but it is dull if you've played the first game, knowing everything previously.



Civil War still life with darkness and blade

Aside from that, it's just told in chunks. Having gameplay broken up into cinematics of people lecturing you on the history of a fictional town gets old fast. So much of the early parts of the game are just sitting around listening to people,

unable to skip lines of dialogue, but afraid to skip the entire segment for fear of missing objectives. Human Head still seems to be living in the shadow of *Rune*, looking more at bloody conflict over a thinking person's game.



Styx II: woodrot

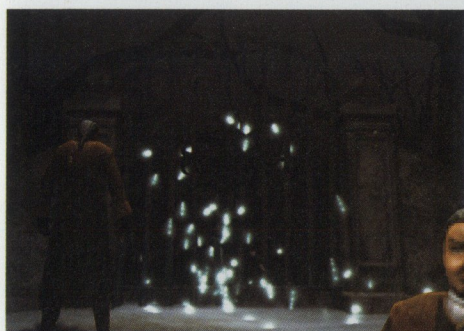
PCPP

OVERALL

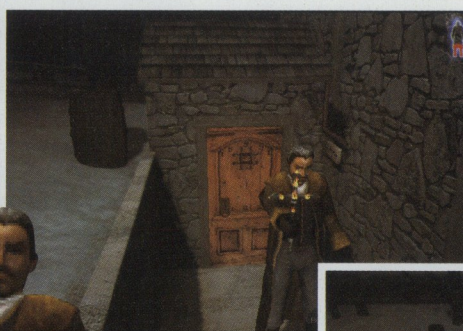
Good setting.
Nothing much to do
at all...

62%

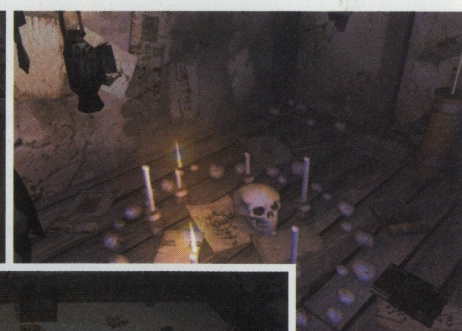
VOLUME 3 ELLY KEDWARD



I probably shouldn't touch that



Burp! Excuse me



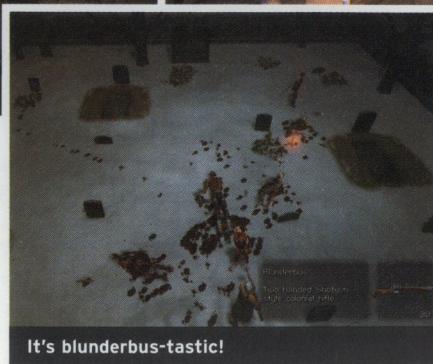
Hi Morte!

Volume 3, *Elly Kedward*, is a curious product, both the best and the worst of the *Blair Witch* series. The best because the action is pretty much non-stop, with a variety of foes and by far the largest amount of weapons, upgrading from the simple flintlock pistol through to big fiery spears, bags of disease and lightning-spitting, life-draining Bibles.

The monsters are rather gory and the moans and shrieks are particularly unpleasant. There's even level bosses here to test your mettle.



It's the worst game of the three for the same reason. It's a thirdperson shooter, and that's all. There is some plot with over done voice acting, a mish mash of Christian and Amerind mythology and even a vague attempt at viewing the *Blair Witch* herself in a different light, but in the end it's a shooter, and that makes



It's blunderbus-tastic!

for a whole new game that doesn't have the sheer freak out of the first game or the grim battles of the second. What it does have is zombies by the bucketful and some rather lovely exploding limbs. It's also the easiest of the games, being a ten hour job if you keep up the pace.

PCPP

OVERALL

Cut loose on
zombie bastards.
Lacks suspense

74%

PRO RALLY 2001

Little cars, bad roads, no competition. It's rally-tastic!



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Ubisoft

PUBLISHER

Ubisoft

DISTRIBUTOR

Ubisoft

PRICE

\$69.95

RATING

G

NEED

Win95/98/Me
P-200
32MB RAM
8MB Videocard
D3D

WANT

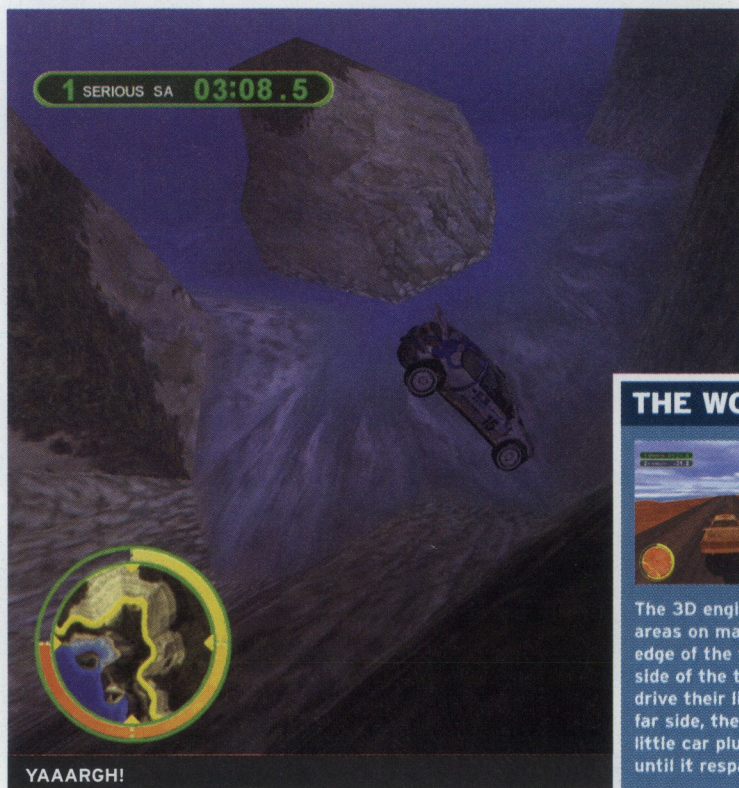
Win98 SE
PII-400
64MB RAM
32MB Videocard
Steering wheel

MULTIPLAYER

TCP/IP

AVAILABLE

Now



THE WORLD IS FLAT



The 3D engine of PR2001 has one amusing curiosity. In many areas on many stages it's quite possible to drive right off the edge of the world. Whenever a branching road appears on the side of the track, hanging a sharp turn allows the player to drive their little car over an inevitable nearby crest. On the far side, they find a great sea of nothingness, into which their little car plummets, never to be seen again. Well at least, not until it respawns back on the track two seconds later.

You will recall our Colin McRae Rally 2.0 review (PCPP#57) in which we described CMR2 as being extremely lean, pure rallying action, none of the fluff. Well, Pro Rally 2001 is the antithesis of CMR2. It's all about fluff, it's all about glitz. Incredibly, there are even helicopters sweeping overhead. This is attractive rallying, with detailed tracks, great looking cars and spectacular stacks. But as a simulator, the game leaves much to be desired.

Firstly though, if being cruel to little cars really aerates your carburettor, then Pro Rally 2001 will suit you to a tee. Most of the stages are designed with a hill on one side of the road and a chasm on the other. Bounce over the barricades and the little car will plummet a hundred metres to smash to bits on the rocky foreshore below. And an abundance of boulders, slopes, rough ground and the occasional tree allow for some of the most elaborate and death-defying motor vehicle accidents yet seen on the PC. Flips, spins, rolls, all are possible with very little effort on the part of the driver. Combined with an excitable damage model, bits of the vehicle will snap off and spin away over the horizon, bumpers crumple and windows shatter.

But no matter how much abuse is heaped on the Citroën Xsara or even the mighty Corolla, the cheeky little buggers just won't go down. Smash headlong into a series of weeping willows, roll down an embankment, freefall two hundred metres into a pounding surf, no matter how hard the driver tries, the car will just reappear magically on the road a few seconds later, ready to keep rallying. Various icons will start to flash in the HUD to indicate the car has been damaged, but these damaged components don't seem to affect handling at all.

Around the World at 80kph

Pro Rally 2001 has an excellent variety of stages available right from the start. Whereas CMR2 only offered a few tracks with others to be unlocked after winning championships, PR2001 gives around 20 different stages to practice in, with a selection of environments and driving conditions. Everything from Greece (tarmac, ancient ruins, hill and chasm) to Australia (sand, gum trees, hill and chasm) and Kenya (blinding sandstorm, camel skeletons, hill and chasm).

This certainly helps to maintain player interest, because unfortunately PR2001 is definitely not the greatest simulator ever. The

focus of the game engine is clearly on graphical splendour, and this pays off. But problems with accurate and responsive control affect the game's ability to compete with the likes of the venerable Colin McRae. Driving with the keyboard takes considerable practice and patience, as the cars respond quite sluggishly.

A driving wheel would be the usual solution, but unfortunately - again - PR2001 seems to have some kind of problem supporting wheels. We tried a number of different wheels, including the Thrustmaster (reviewed p100) on several different PCs, but all of them behaved erratically with the game. When the wheels did work, however, control was markedly improved and the game became even more fun to play.

Fun sums up Pro Rally 2001 very well. While CMR2 is a complex and difficult simulator that will test your skills as a virtual driver, PR2001 is more about pounding along crazy roads and trying to crash even more ridiculously than last time. A necessary absence of competing vehicles (this is a rally after all) means the action pales after a few hours play, but for an afternoon's bushbashing, Pro Rally 2001 can do no wrong.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

OVERALL

Rallying for the masses with plenty of fluff...

68%

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Recreating the greatest ever air war proves a piece of cake

DETAILS

DEVELOPER
Rowan

PUBLISHER
Empire

DISTRIBUTOR
Electronic Arts

PRICE
\$79.95

RATING
M

NEED
Win 95/98/Me
PII 300
Dx7 compatible gfx
w/8Mb RAM
32Mb RAM
6X CD

WANT
PIII 800
gfx card w/32Mb RAM
128 Mb RAM
Dx7 compatible
sound
56K modem for
multiplayer

MULTIPLAYER
TCP/IP, LAN

AVAILABLE
Now

ONLINE

www.battleofbritain.net
There are few Battle Of Britain sites on the web. This is one of the best ones!



PCPP

OVERALL
*Quality, atmospheric,
seat-of-the-pants
flight simming*

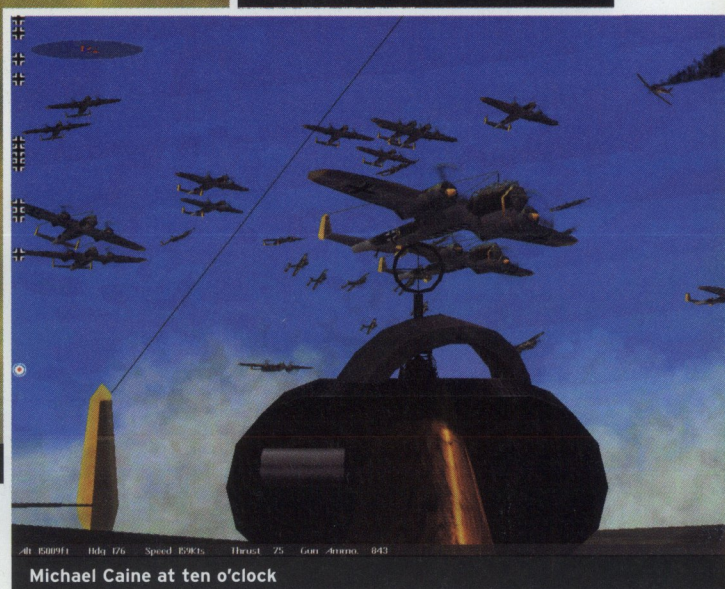
90%



There'll be bluebirds over etc...



That guy had blue eyes



Michael Caine at ten o'clock

British pilots in the Battle of Britain had an average life expectancy of about three and a half seconds. They barely had enough time to light up a pipe and say "Tally ho, chaps!" before someone named Hans seared their wedding tackle off with a well placed burst of German efficiency.

The krauts didn't fare much better, what with fatty Goering constantly trying to lure their pilots into 'open minded' weekends away to his country estate and Hitler wanting them to bomb every Airfix factory into oblivion to avenge the fact that his Lancaster model only came with three propellers.

And to this day there are Poms who still call them 'the good 'ol days!' With all the importance and mythology surrounding this great battle it's surprising that so few games have attempted to portray it. Rowan's new hybrid simulator not only does the job, it does it bloody well.

Angels Twenty

Battle Of Britain is not only a great game but also one of the very, very few that have managed to combine two different genres successfully. It not only lets the player fly Spitfires, Hurricanes, Me 109 & 110s, and gun

for He111s, Ju88s and Do17s, but also has a strategic and tactical game so

complete it can be played on its own without ever climbing into a cockpit.

First the flying bit, which I can sum up in a word: awesome! Air battles have never been like this in a game before. Battle of Britain supports hundreds and hundreds of bombers

and fighters in the air at once and they really are an impressive sight.

Sitting in a rear gun position on a German bomber and looking back over a formation of 600 bombers being attacked by Spitfires and Hurricanes is something you won't experience in any other game, not even B-17. Oh, and the flight dynamics are good too.

Of course there is a performance cost to this, but considering what's going on it's not that bad. On my Celeron running at 525MHz with a bog standard GeForce256 card the slowdown was quite acceptable after a bit of tweaking.

Bombing old Blighty

When it comes time to put the wheels down, Battle Of Britain has a lot more work for you to do. Whether you play as a German or Pom, almost every little detail of planning, resourcing and allocating forces is under your control. As the British commander, you have to react intelligently to German raids, not committing too many forces to the wrong attack and basically keeping the RAF in the air until Operation Sealion (the invasion of England) has been cancelled.

As the German player your job is to take out the RAF so that the invasion can commence, by bombing airfields, docks, convoys, radar and London itself, and to husband your forces wisely and not lose too many planes.

The end result is a gripping, absorbing game that combines strategy and action brilliantly. By the way, this review was written after playing the patched version of Battle of Britain. Without the patch the menus are a bit of a nightmare to navigate, get the patch from www.empireinteractive.com!

George Soropos

PGA GOLF TITANIUM EDITION

Pass the loud pants

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Sierra Sports

PUBLISHER

Sierra

DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of all Games

PRICE

TBA

RATING

G

NEED

Win9x
PII-350
32Mb RAM

WANT

Win98 SE
Duron 700
64Mb RAM

MULTIPLAYER

Hotseat, TCP/IP

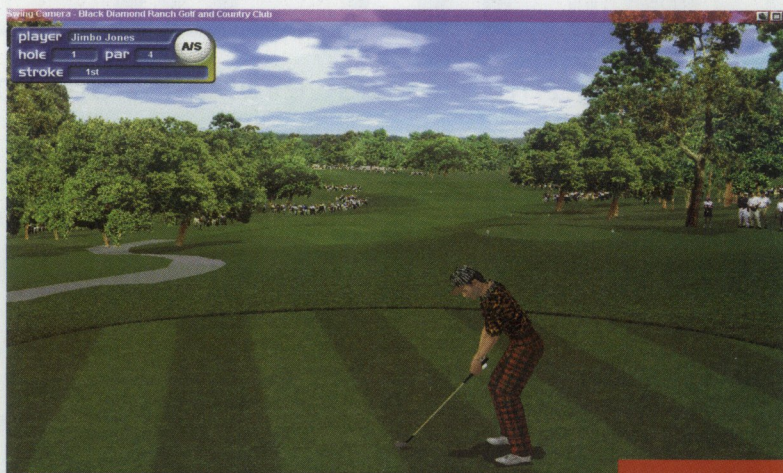
AVAILABLE

Now

Sierra, with its release of PGA Championship Golf 2000 Titanium Edition shows an empathy for the new breed of golfer. The inspiring-music-backed opening sequence shows a young, hip, goateed golfer doing battle with - and we quote - "one of those par 3's where just finding the green is an accomplishment". Never before has the ancient conflict between man and grass been captured with such an eye to philosophy.

The game features TrueSwing Control, a trademarked technology where the force with which you slide your mouse determines how hard the ball will be hit. A laminated sheet showing the myriad convolutions of this system is included in the box, and should take pride of place on the wall of your gaming den. Flight Sim controls don't look this serious.

Sierra have gone all-out to update our perceptions of golf - short of shelling out actual money for actual licences or actual players. PGACG2000TE looks pretty, handles well, sounds good and lets you pretend



Golf wear: stylish and comfortable

you're doing something other than playing golf. The Titanium Edition Course Pack lets you put more balls in different holes, making it infinitely superior to the earlier Tungsten-Carbide edition. Perhaps the most touching decision on the part of the designers is their willingness to share with us their philosophy on life in general and golf game construction in particular. This is presented in two extracts, helpfully

captioned "philosophy". We leave you with perhaps their most penetrating insight: "A course is much more than the sum of its holes". Who could but agree?

Paul Barnsley

PCPP

OVERALL

A groundbreaking golf game with intuitive TrueSwing Control TM

86%

CHICKEN RUN

Metal Gear Solid can get clucked



DETAILS

DEVELOPER

Blitz Games

PUBLISHER

Eidos

DISTRIBUTOR

Ozisoft

PRICE

\$79.95

RATING

G

NEED

P-200
32MB RAM

WANT

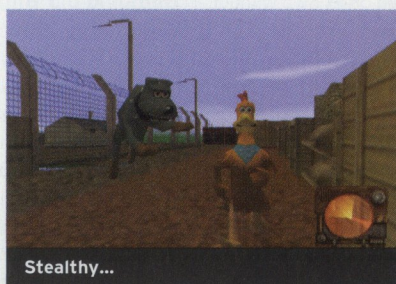
PII-300
64MB RAM

MULTIPLAYER

No

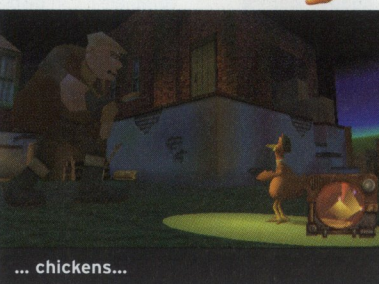
AVAILABLE

Now



Chicken Run is a stealth chicken game. A game involving *stealthy chickens*. If that isn't weird and kooky enough to warrant a re-reading or a wry grin, then I don't know what is.

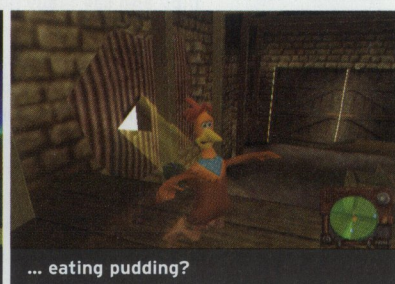
Oddly though, it's not the only thing that will bring a smile to your cynically twisted lips. Chicken Run also happens to be an amusing parody of stealth shooter games - Metal Gear Solid, in particular. As one of the said stealthy chickens, the player must sneak around a farm collecting various implements that will be used to eventually escape. This must be done while avoiding the farmer and his dogs



and other bad type things by utilising the radar display situated at the screen's bottom. It's Metal Gear... except with chickens.

It must be said that Chicken Run rarely comes down to blazing machine gun battles with the farmer or his dogs, unlike Konami's monster hit. Instead, Chicken Run delivers colourful, fun graphics combined with simple, non-violent gameplay. Technically the game is good for what it wants to achieve, although it should be mentioned that - true to the MGS legacy - the controls are rather fiddly.

Although clearly aimed at kids, this is far from a cynical cash-in. What sets Chicken



Run apart is the fact it's actually good and can be played by anyone of any age. Kids will play it as a simple alternative to complex stealthers and adults, hopefully, will treat it as a lighthearted, fun little parody that, unlike most game parodies, is actually funny.

Daniel Staines

PCPP

OVERALL

Look, just cluck off and play if for a bit of fun, alright?

69%

DUKE NUKEM FOREVER

3D Realms crush the critics with the greatest game ever BAR NONE

DETAILS

DEVELOPER

3D Realms

PUBLISHER

Gathering of Developers

DISTRIBUTOR

Jack of all Games

PRICE

\$109.95

RATING

MA15+

NEED

Win9x
PIII-500
128Mb RAM
900Mb HDD
Voodoo5
Glide
SBLive!
VR Headset

WANT

BeOS R5 Pro
Dual Athlon 1.2
512Mb RAM
30.6 GB HDD
256Mb FireGL
Direct3D
Gametheater XP
Ray Bans

MULTIPLAYER

TCP/IP, LAN,
Internet, Modem,
Hotseat

AVAILABLE

1st April 2001



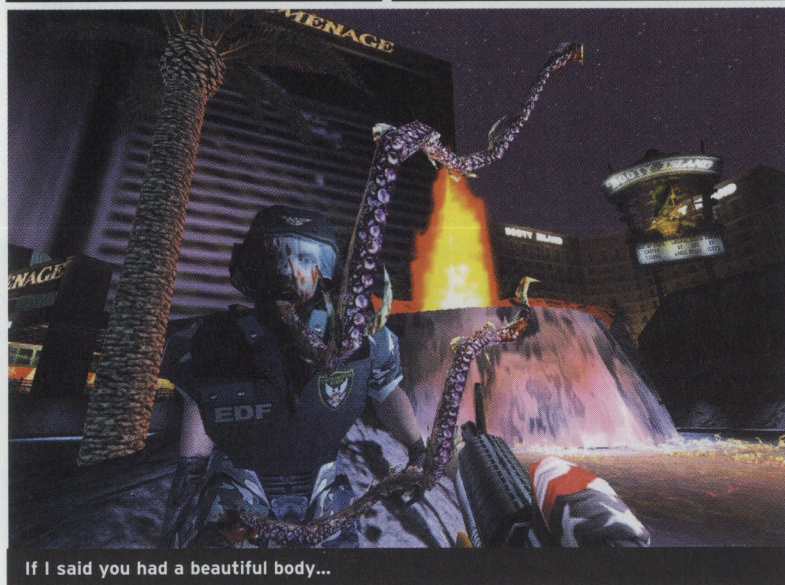
Viruses: infectious



Boom! Shakalaka!



General + Missile, oil on canvas



If I said you had a beautiful body...

OLD DOG, NEW TRICKS...

Duke Nukem Forever is all about set pieces. The game is full of classic, memorable scenes, in the manner of a great film such as *M1:2*. Our favourite moment is when Duke HALO jumps out of an alien UFO travelling at supersonic speeds onto a USAF nuclear cruise missile, which he then has to disarm. The bit with the alien Queen is really good too, if rather crassly sexual.



From there it's a helicopter gunship ride to Area 51, down the street from Duke's house, where he's properly briefed by General Lemuel Hairtrigger. As the briefing is just winding up, and amusingly, just as General Hairtrigger says "follow your orders and you may make it back alive" an enormous tentacle smashes through the wall and tears his head off.

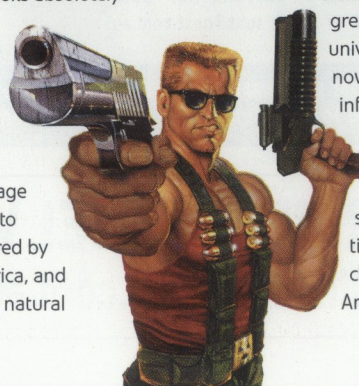
B-movie

The game is like the greatest B-movie ever. Duke's wisecracking ways are back, and he has an incredible arsenal of kick-arse weapons such as the super shotgun and rocket launcher and rocket propelled grenade launcher and also a machine gun!

As you can see, I have just run out of room. Like we said, this game arrived exactly thirteen minutes after we sent the mag for printing, so we sprinted down the street and intercepted the truck before it could go.

Duke Nukem Forever is the greatest game in the universe, and very soon now we hope to bring you information about the gameplay, the enemies and of course, the huge, slaving bosses. It's time to kick arse and chew bubble-gum. And we're all out of gum.

Max Payne



PCPP

FOR

- Duke is kick arse
- Engine's fantastic
- Great original plot

AGAINST

- Too much nudity
- The alien sex seems fake
- No Direct3D

OVERALL

Possibly the greatest single thing ever. Due April 1st. Buy it!

99%

Due for release on the very first day of April, 2001, Duke Nukem Forever, the long awaited sequel to the classic Duke3D, proves that taking four years to develop a game, and insisting it will be finished only "when it's done" certainly pays off.

Move over Deus Ex, the new king of gaming is here. Duke Nukem Forever is, quite simply, the best game we have ever seen. A late review copy, received only days before this issue was due to be printed, means we're not able to give Duke the space he deserves, but we figured you'd want to know how kick-arse this game is the very second we played it.

DukeWorld

For a start, there's a whole new engine. Recent news that suggested DNF would be using the Unreal 2 engine has proven nothing more than a smokescreen. The game uses a previously secret 3D Realms proprietary engine called DukeWorld, and it is fantastic. Real world settings as diverse as a secret US military missile base and a secret

Russian submarine construction complex are intricately detailed. Everything is useable and destructible. I mean, forget Deus Ex and its health restoring water fountains, in DNF, you can walk into a bar, order a six-pack of brewskies, drink them, and then throw the empty cans at buzzards in the street!

A quick word on the plot. After saving Earth's chicks from the aliens in Duke3D, Duke Nukem is relaxing at home on Nukem Ranch. He's just kicking back when a USAF F/A-18 fighter crashes into his swimming pool. This is all done with the DukeWorld engine, by the way, and looks absolutely fantastic. Huge explosions, water flashing into steam, and Duke's daiquiri flying out of his surprised hand.

A wounded airman staggers out of the wreckage and breathlessly explains to Duke that a virus engineered by the aliens is loose in America, and Duke is the only man with natural immunity to the virus.

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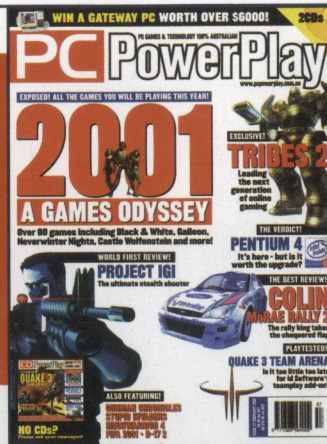
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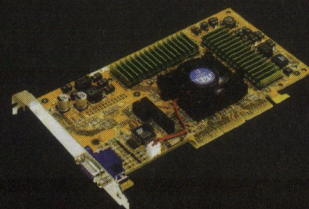
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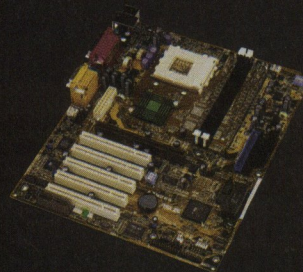
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IN REVIEW

The silicon state of the art

TECH



I just got back from a holiday in Thailand, where LAN gaming has exploded - every street block in Bangkok features at least one Internet Café, with a constant LAN battle in action. While StarCraft remains perennially popular amongst the Koreans, Counter Strike seems to be the game of choice for Thais. The piracy scene is also rampant. On Kho San Road, a mecca for Lonely Planet-wielding tourists, shops offer a wide range of copied PlayStation and PC games. I witnessed one Aussie battler handing over mere dollars for bags full of warez CDs. Even worse, I noticed he had even slipped in a copy of Daikatana.

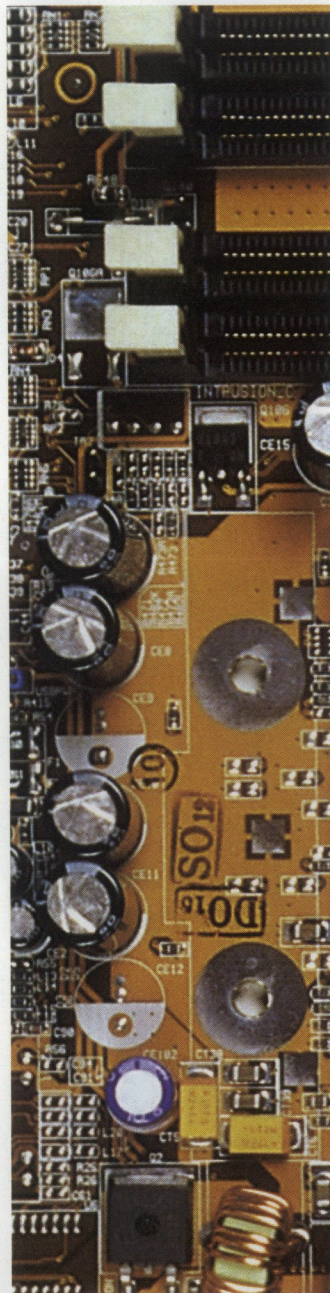
We've received a lot of email from readers asking whether Pentium 4 systems are worth the cost. To sum up what we said some months ago, the Pentium 4 is an extremely powerful games platform, spoiled by the high cost of RDRAM and i850 motherboards. For the moment, the Socket A platform remains the wisest choice for upgraders - not only do the Athlon and Duron offer excellent price/performance, but the VIA chipset has matured considerably.

The motherboard PowerTest was a pleasure to write: for the first time in my history as a hardware reviewer, all of the products offered excellent stability. The market seems to have reached a mature plateau, where performance is not the only priority for manufacturers. Also, to our collective surprise, there were no faulty parts among the 35 motherboards we received from the local distributors.

I was v. chuffed with the PowerTest last month - it met with a huge reader response, so it looks like the PowerTest will remain with us for the foreseeable future. Next month, we're covering Optical drives, so if you're in the market for a new CD-R or CD-ROM drive, this will be essential stuff...

Anyway, I hope you benefit from these pages. Enjoy, and let me know what you think!

hughns@next.com.au



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THE PCPP POWERTEST SYSTEM



The Power Award is given to the highest performing product each month. We don't take into account the cost of the component, or what extra functionality it might have. We just look for raw power.



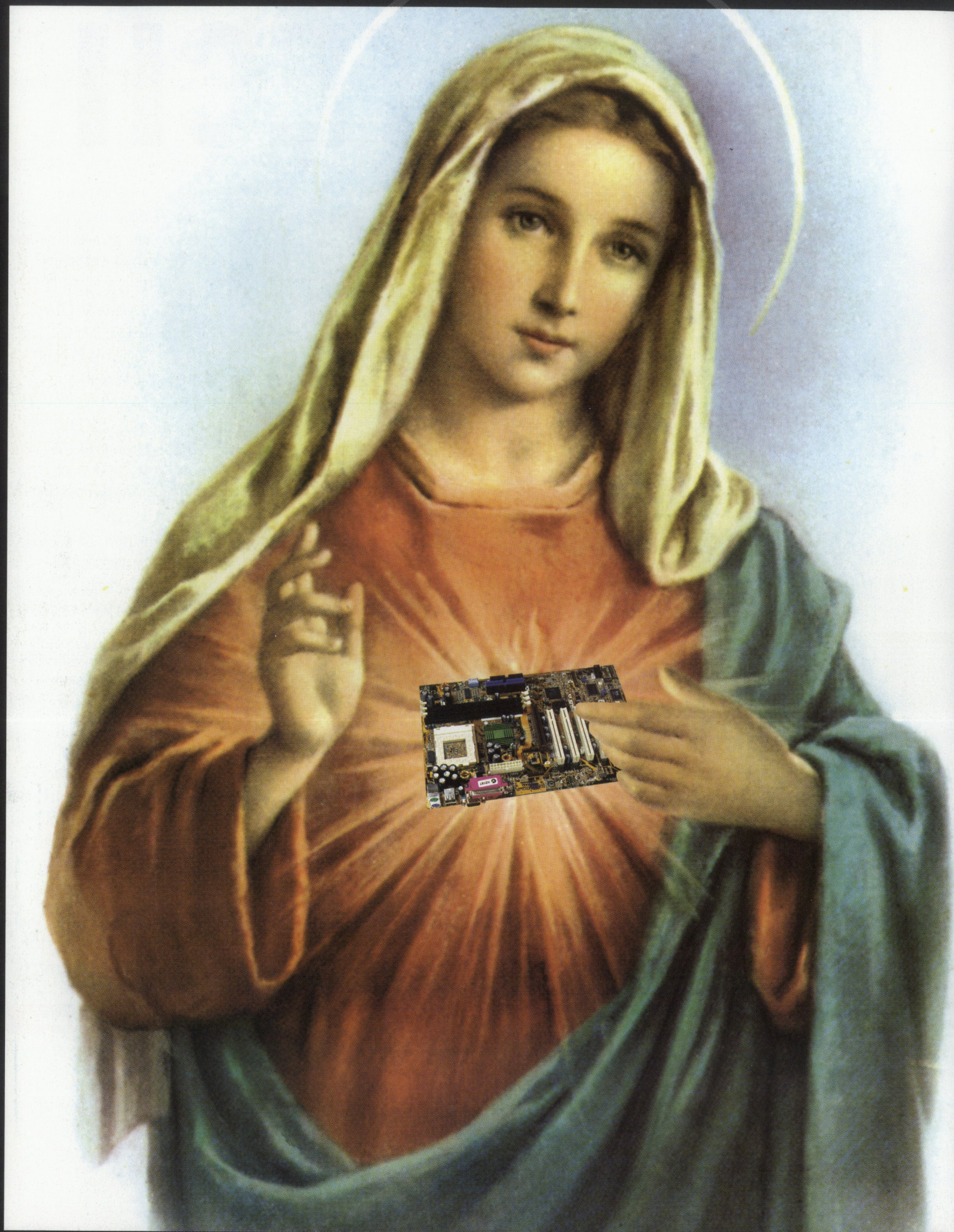
The Value Award is given each month to the product that offers the best balance between performance and cost. It also takes into account any extras that come with the product, such as added connectivity or software bundle.



For some PowerTests, power will be more important than value. For others, value will be paramount. That's why at the end of each PowerTest we give a PCPP Gold Award to the product that, all things considered, is the best buy.

THE PCPP HOTWARE RATINGS SYSTEM

90+	Excellent. A must buy.
80-89	Worthy product, which is hard to fault. May be slightly lacking in extra features, value or performance.
60-79	Competent product, significantly behind the State of the Art.
40-59	Mediocre with little to recommend it.
0-39	A dog. Avoid.
Distributor	The local point of contact for the product.
Price	The RRP at the time of going to print.
URL	Where to find further relevant information.



Immaculate Construction

MOTHERBOARD POWERTEST BY HUGH NORTON-SMITH

■ The motherboard, also described as the 'mainboard', is the cornerstone of the modern PC. Every component within your computer is connected to the motherboard. Peripherals, such as a videocard or soundcard, plug directly into the motherboard. CD-ROM drives, hard disks and floppy drives are attached to the motherboard using an IDE cable. Both the CPU and system RAM are mounted on the motherboard. Ergo, your choice of motherboard will determine your upgrade path - not only will it govern what type of RAM your PC will use, but it will also tie you to a certain CPU form factor.

Recent years have witnessed an explosive change in the motherboard market. Up until the mid 1990s, motherboards were virtually indistinguishable. Quality and upgrade potential were eschewed in favour of rock-bottom prices. Motherboards have improved markedly since this time. Currently, there's a myriad of motherboards on the market, all of which offer slightly different configurations and options. So there's a motherboard suited to just about any task.

Not only has build-quality and performance been greatly enhanced, but it's come to the point where manufacturers have to come up with innovative ways of persuading you to part with your cash. All but the most basic motherboards feature overclocking options, integrated ATA/100 hard drive support, and other value-added features. Finally, some manufacturers like Abit and Asus, are now adding advanced features like onboard RAID, optional integrated networking, and even support for AGP Pro.

However, despite the overall rise in standards, there are plenty of factors to help differentiate between models. With motherboards, performance shouldn't be a purchasing criteria, as all motherboards using the same chipset will offer very similar benchmark results; with boards from major name manufacturers, performance in the field is within about 5% of each other. As a result, buyers should discriminate between boards solely on features, stability, quality, overclocking capabilities and cost.

In the ensuing pages we test eighteen different motherboards, from eight different manufacturers, in order to determine which is most worthy of separating you from a substantial wad of cash. The PowerTest is divided into three broad categories: six Socket-A motherboards designed for the AMD Athlon/Duron, six Socket-370 motherboards for the Intel Pentium III and Celeron, and six Socket-423 motherboards intended for the fledgling Pentium 4.

VIA KT133

The Premiere AMD Athlon/Duron Chipset

VIA is the most important manufacturer of chipsets for the AMD Athlon/Duron platform. The KT133, designed for Socket-A AMD chips, is a forward-looking chipset. It includes support for asynchronous system memory, AGP 4x and is attractively low cost. The KT133A, released last month, is the updated version of the KT133, offering genuine 133MHz FSB support for the new breed of 266Mhz Athlon CPUs.

We considered both the VIA KT266 and the AMD 760 DDR chipsets for this PowerTest. However, at the time of the writing, boards based on these chipsets were scarce. Also, the current high cost of DDR DRAM makes it an unsuitable solution for the mainstream market.

Intel i815e

Replacing the BX for Pentium IIIs

There's a definite allure to Intel chipsets, as Intel has been making chipsets for longer than anyone else. Ignoring the whole i820 Camino fiasco, Intel chipsets are recognised for their solid performance and legendary reliability. Intel solutions also work properly right off the bat, without requiring any additional tweaking. Much of this is due to Microsoft and its myopic OS design; while industry behemoth Intel is supported out-of-the-box, VIA products require patching and updates to achieve decent stability. And, while you may pay a premium for an Intel chipset board, you certainly get what you pay for.

The i815e is Intel's latest chipset for Pentium III, Celeron and Cyrix 3 processors. Using the FC-PGA socket, these boards will support everything from a 128kb Mendocino Celeron all the way up to one of the recalled 1.13GHz Pentium IIIs. The i815e is essentially an advanced version of the i810, featuring Intel's advanced hub architecture, ATA/100, AGP 4x, onboard video, and full support for the 133MHz Front Side Bus. It also carries over some of the limitations of the i810, including integrated audio and a maximum of 512MB RAM.

Intel i850

The first chipset for the Pentium 4

For the Pentium 4 platform, all of the boards in the PowerTest feature the Intel i850 chipset. Until VIA produces a competing solution, perhaps based on DDR memory, the i850 is the only chipset available for the Pentium 4. The i850 is based on a similar core to the i840 chipset, and comes with dual-channel RAMBUS support. Other highlights include 400MHz FSB support, ATA/100 and AGP 4x.

MOTHERBOARD DISSECTION

For most gamers, the computer motherboard is an object of endless confusion. It's an arcane slab of silicon, covered with huge capacitors, mystifying chips, slots, sockets and connectors. Motherboards can be very bewildering to the uninitiated.

Ever wondered what PCI involves? What an AGP slot actually does? If you're unclear how a motherboard works, or what some of these confusing terms mean, then you've come to the right place. The PCPP Motherboard Dissection is intended to eliminate the mystique surrounding the motherboard.

On the testbed, we have the Asus CUSL2-C. It's an extremely popular board, and uses a very standard design. Most of the features mentioned below will be common to other motherboards. In sum, the CUSL2-C an excellent example of current motherboard design. It's been stripped of all its peripherals, eviscerated for all to see...

CPU SOCKET

This motherboard features a Socket-370 connector intended for Intel P3 and Celeron processors. To the left of the ZIF (Zero Insertion Force) socket is the retention arm. This is designed to secure the CPU from moving. A heatsink and fan are mounted above the CPU.

VOLTAGE CAPACITORS

A capacitor is a passive electronic component that stores energy as an internal electronic field. In a motherboard, they have two broad functions. Principally, they are used to smooth out the AC current, providing a pure stream of battery-like DC direct to components. In this way, large, high quality capacitors are essential to stable operation, as they smooth out any 'spikes' in the current. Capacitors are also used to maintain the contents of on-board memory. DRAM must be continuously refreshed, and the capacitors provide the means to achieve this.

USB PORTS

Universal Serial Bus (USB) is the emerging standard for connecting external peripherals to your PC. USB is completely plug-and-play. It can even deliver a moderate current in order to power devices.

RAM SLOTS

The RAM slots are for inserting DIMM modules - Boards come with up to 4 RAM slots, allowing for great expandability. Extra memory is easily installed. Upgraders simply need to push additional memory into a spare slot.

DIP SWITCHES

The bank of DIP switches allow you to change certain system settings without entering the BIOS. The Asus CUSL2-C, for example, allows you to change the system bus via DIP switches.

PARALLEL & SERIAL PORTS

The Parallel port is often used for connecting old, non-USB printers. The serial port is used for very simple networking, old style computer mice and sometimes, external modems. Both of these will be completely superseded by USB and/or Firewire in the near future.

IDE CONNECTORS

Most mainboards feature two IDE channels. Each IDE channel can access two devices simultaneously, allowing for a maximum of 4 devices. A typical configuration could feature a DVD-ROM drive, a CD burner, a hard drive and an IDE Zip drive. IDE is available in 3 flavours: ATA/33, ATA/66 and the all-new ATA/100 standard. ATA/33 is now defunct, with most boards now supporting an ATA/100 controller.

CMOS BATTERY

The CMOS stores a small amount of information about the computer setup, including user passwords, date and time, as well as hard disk and memory configuration. Information is backed-up by this replaceable Lithium battery.

CNR SLOT

The Communication and Network Riser (CNR) slot is a new standard designed for low-cost network, modem and audio products designed specifically for the smaller CNR port. CNR devices rely on the CPU to do much of the computationally expensive work.

AGP SLOT

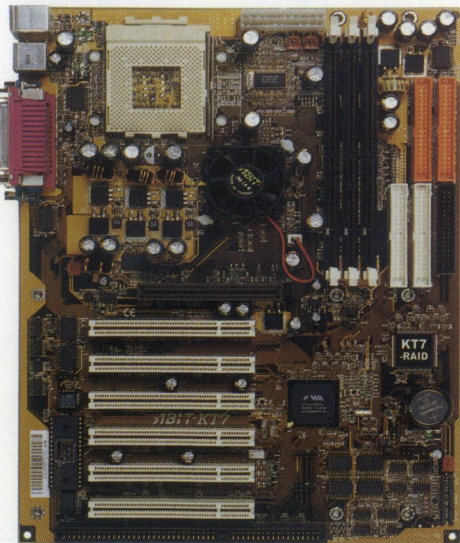
The Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) was designed specifically for graphics cards, as a high-speed alternative to the 33Mhz PCI bus. This 32-bit bus architecture is available in a variety of speeds, ranging from 1x through to 4x. At the default 1x, AGP operates at 66Mhz, offering twice the bandwidth as PCI. AGP helps maximise available memory for graphics cards - it allows graphics cards to store textures within main system memory.

CPU CHIPSET

This is the most important part of the motherboard. The chipset provides an interface between memory and CPU, as well as managing all I/O operations. A small heatsink is mounted above the chipset to provide max heat dissipation.

PCI SLOTS

The Peripheral Component Interface (PCI) is a 32-bit bus architecture designed for general expansion requirements. PCI operates at 33Mhz. It's been about since the 486, and provides a common interface for internal devices like modems, soundcards, video cards and SCSI adaptors. PCI-X, due out late this year, is slated as the replacement for PCI.



ABIT KT7A-RAID

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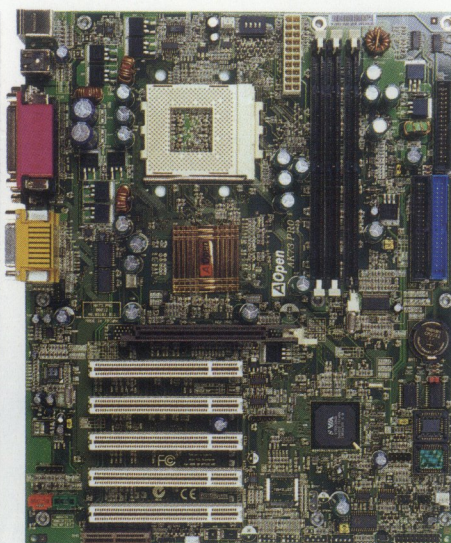
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URL www.evo.com.au

The KT7A-RAID is identical to the original KT7-RAID, save for the addition of a new Northbridge and Southbridge. The new 686B adds built-in support for UDMA/100 drives, while the KT133A chipset adds support for a 133MHz Front Side Bus. Although the original KT133 had the option to run at a 133MHz FSB, architectural limitations kept it from running at much more than 100MHz.

The Abit board has plenty of room for expansion. There are 6 PCI slots, an AGP and an ISA slot for legacy devices. It's also the only board we've seen which doesn't include an AMR or CNR slot, which is a clear indication of this board's hardcore pedigree. Eight ATA/100 IDE devices can be connected to the board: four through the 686B Southbridge, and four using the Highpoint HTP370 RAID controller. If you thought the original KT7 board was an overclocker's delight, you'll be particularly pleased with the new KT7A series. Thanks to the new chipset, the KT7A-RAID is the most capable overclocking board in the PowerTest. This board was made with the Duron in mind. SoftMenu III is a well-honed BIOS tweaking program, which gives access to a vast array of overclocking options. One can adjust the processor's multiplier, the processor's voltage, the chipset's voltage, and a huge array of memory settings. Also consider that unless you run a Duron or Athlon which has been 'unlocked', you won't be able to use the multiplier adjustments. Thankfully, this is a fairly straightforward process.

Building on the foundation of the KT7-RAID, the KT7A is a seriously impressive board. For overclocking junkies, this is *the* board to get.




AOPEN
AK73 PRO

DISTRIBUTOR Servex Australia 02 8762 3520

PRICE \$319

URL www.servex.com.au

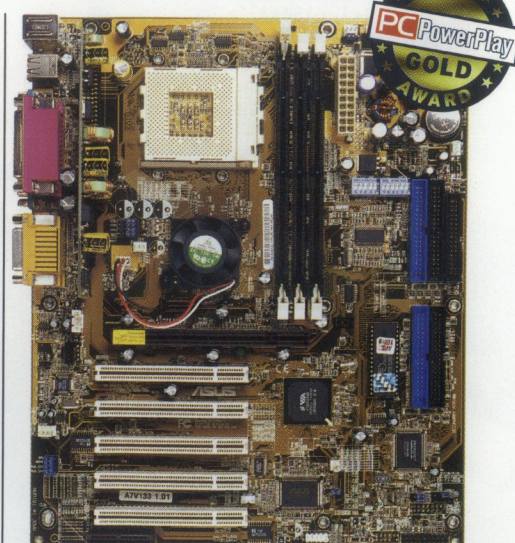
 This board features the same 24k gold heatsink found in the snazzy Aopen i815E board. Although not guaranteed to improve your chances of overclocking, it does look *classy*. With the motherboard, you will also find some of the best documentation we've seen. Not only is there a large manual (which even mentions overclocking!), but there is also a fold-out starter guide for easy installation. A copy of Norton AntiVirus 2000 (v6.0) is included on a separate CD, which is an excellent bonus.

The AK73 Pro features five PCI, one AMR and one AGP slot. The AGP 4x socket comes with a retention clip, for keeping the AGP card secure during transportation. Although the motherboard features the increasingly ancient KT133 chipset, it does include the 686B Southbridge. The 686B adds ATA/100 support to the original 686A design.

The 'Pro' moniker indicates the ability to adjust the CPU voltage. This can be adjusted in the BIOS, which can help improve the reliability and success of a CPU overclock. Assuming you have an unlocked AMD CPU, the multiplier can be selected from 5 to 12.5 by DIP switch, while the FSB is still negotiated through the BIOS. There are only a limited number of FSB presets.

Dr Voice was the most odd feature we have ever seen on a motherboard. Essentially, Dr Voice is a flashier version of Dr LED. It provides a voice read-out of the problem your motherboard has encountered, in up to 4 different languages!

Despite the unwieldy overclocking options and the rather antique KT133 chipset, the Aopen AK73 Pro is a great board with a solid feature set. Worth considering.




ASUS
A7V133

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288

PRICE \$335

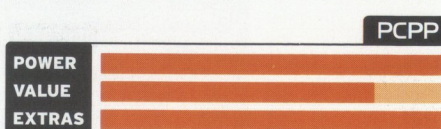
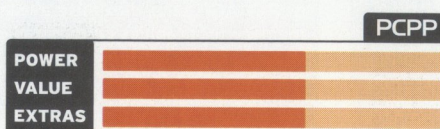
URL www.achieva.com.au

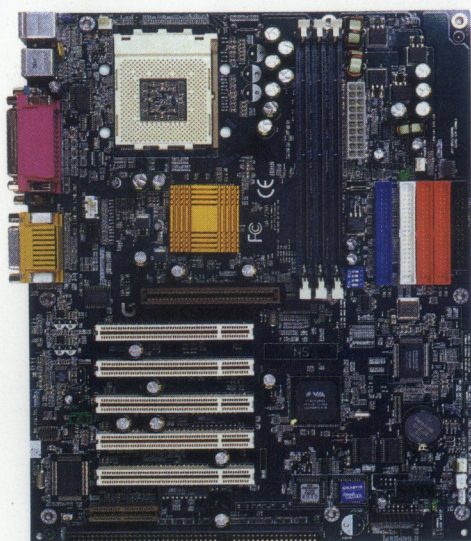
 The A7V133 is the follow-up to Asus's hit A7V board, using the new KT133A chipset. While the early revisions of the A7V had some problems (principally with the Promise IDE controller and IDE activity LEDs), the A7V has since matured into one of the best KT133 boards on the market. The A7V133 builds on that success, not only equipping the board with a new chipset and fan, but also adding full RAID support for zippy I/O transfers.

Both the 686B Southbridge and the Promise controller now support ATA/100. Thus, you can connect up to eight ATA/100 drives to the motherboard, four of which can be integrated into a basic RAID array.

A highlight of the original A7V were the DIP switches for adjusting the CPU multiplier. Although AMD chips are shipped with a locked multiplier clock, this can be easily remedied with the help of a graphite pencil. The A7V133 is an even better board for overclocking enthusiasts. The new chipset, which comes with a sizeable heatsink/fan, allows users to push Athlon/Duron chips to previously unheard of FSB levels. Although the handy-dandy DIP switches remain, adjustments to the multiplier, FSB speed and Vcore can be made through the extensive BIOS menu.

The A7V133 also comes with an AGP Pro slot for power-hungry AGP cards. Three DIMM slots will hold up to 1.5GB of PC133 SDRAM. Ignoring the lack of a sixth PCI slot, the A7V133 is a virtually flawless board. Not only is it chock full of cutting edge features, but it also comes with the build quality of a Swiss watch.





GIGABYTE

GA-7ZXR

DISTRIBUTOR Synnex Australia 1300 651 665

PRICE \$299

URL www.synnex.com.au

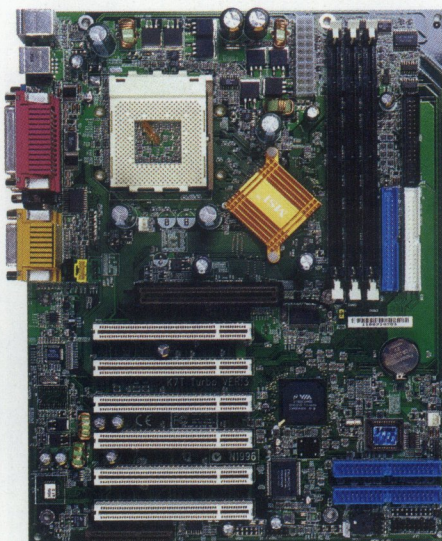
This is the first Gigabyte we've encountered that really tries hard to please the enthusiast market. With Abit, Asus and MSI the current favourites of discerning end-users, Gigabyte surprised us with the GA-7ZXR. With a Promise RAID controller, DualBIOS technology, an embedded Creative audio chip, and a host of other interesting features, the GA-7ZXR demands recognition.

There are two independent IDE controllers: The 686A South Bridge for ATA/66 support and the much-loved Promise ATA/100 RAID controller. In total, eight separate IDE devices can be hooked up. The GA-7ZXR also includes three DIMM slots. There are five PCI slots, an AGP slot (with retention mechanism), a CNR slot and, to our collective surprise, an antique ISA slot as well.

For us, the inclusion of a CNR slot is completely unnecessary. The board is targeted at the enthusiast market, who are unlikely to install a device that could potentially impinge upon optimal performance.

Overclocking, sadly, leaves a lot to be desired. The BIOS menu is rather spartan, lacking any multiplier or FSB settings. However, six different system bus speeds can be selected, using DIP switches on the motherboard. Like all KT133 boards, the memory can be run asynchronously from the system bus, at either 100 or 133 MHz, depending on the type of RAM installed.

At the time of writing, Gigabyte didn't have a KT133A solution on the market, although its release is imminent. For overclockers, this board should be ignored in favour of an Abit or Asus option. Otherwise, this is a capable offering from Gigabyte. Respect!



MSI

K7T-R TURBO

DISTRIBUTOR MSI Australia 02 9748 0070

PRICE \$336

URL www.msi.com.au

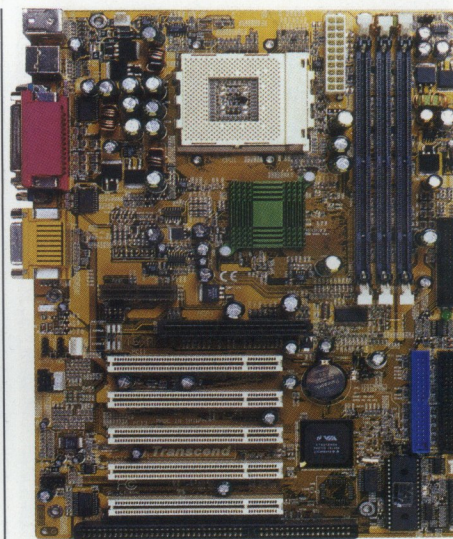
The 'Turbo' title indicates that this board uses VIA's new KT133A chipset. This core logic chip is architecturally identical to the KT133, the only difference being official support for a 133MHz FSB. This means that the chip is fully compatible with the new 266MHz Athlon CPUs.

Besides the updated chipset and a spiffy orange heatsink, the MSI K7T Turbo-R is very similar to the rest of the K7T family. It still has plenty of room for future upgrades: an extensive six PCI slots are complemented by an AGP4x and CNR slot. Three DIMM slots are available, for a maximum of 1.5GB memory.

The new VIA 686B Southbridge has native ATA/100 support for up to four devices. The Promise RAID controller provides an additional two ATA/100 compliant IDE sockets. In total, users can have eight IDE devices installed, all with support for ATA/100. RAID 0 and RAID 1 are fully supported; MSI has even included a separate manual that explains how to install and operate RAID.

Overclockers can either use the extensive BIOS menu or, alternatively, Fuzzy Logic 2. This utility is similar to Gigabyte's EasyTune III, and allows for overclocking on the fly within Windows. Fuzzy Logic 2 adjusts both the FSB and the PCI divider. LiveBIOS is another novel application, which automatically updates the BIOS from the MSI FTP site. The motherboard also includes the D-LED diagnostic LED system. The LED display helps users determine problems with the mainboard or any attached peripherals.

With the new KT133A chipset and so many value-added features, the MSI K7T Turbo-R is a definite contender for best AMD motherboard.



TRANSCEND

TS-AKT4

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288

PRICE \$230

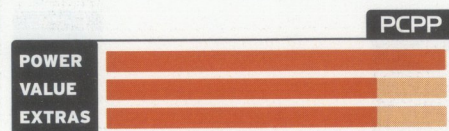
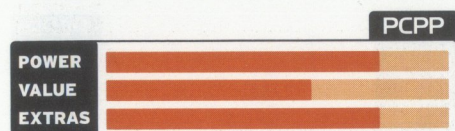
URL www.achieva.com.au

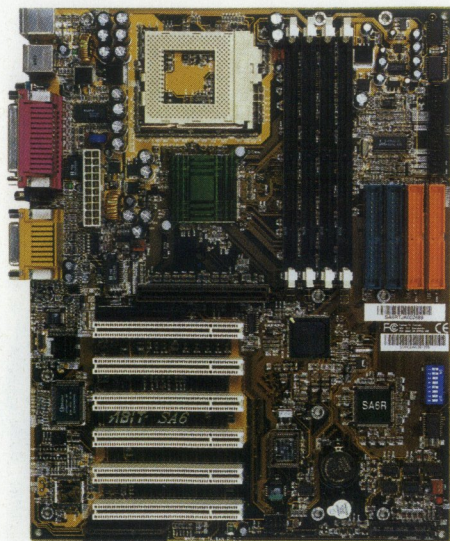
This is probably the least exciting Socket-A board reviewed in the PowerTest. The onboard sound is about the only slightly intriguing feature of an otherwise unremarkable board.

Expansion is modest, with five PCI slots, an AGP 4x port, an ISA slot and an Audio Modem Riser (AMR) connector. Without a Promise/Highpoint controller, or the new 686B Southbridge, the TS-AKT4 is the only board in the round up sans ATA/100. Instead, the board is limited to a rather paltry ATA/66 and a maximum of four IDE devices. In reality, however, ATA/66 shouldn't be too much of a performance issue, as very few hard drives can even approach a burst speed of 66MB/s.

The TS-AKT4 allows you to change the FSB and voltage settings through the BIOS. The Front Side bus can be shifted between 100 and 133MHz. Note that FSB speeds over 110MHz are unlikely, particularly with a first-generation KT133 board. Voltage can be moved all the way up to 1.85 volts in 0.1-volt increments; bumping up the voltage can damage your CPU through overheating, but can often increase stability in overclocked situations.

The layout is messy, with an excess of transistors and oddly positioned connectors. Large CPU heatsinks will have difficulty fitting in the cramped space provided. The only redeeming part of the TS-AKT4 is the price. At \$230, it makes a good way to build an inexpensive, simple Duron system. It would, for instance, make a good motherboard for your Mum. Or your little sister. We also enjoyed Transcend's bizarre motto, emblazoned on the manual and packaging: 'Your Supplier, Your Partner, Your Friend!' Scary stuff, indeed.





ABIT

SA6-R

DISTRIBUTOR EYO Technologies 02 9822 2550

PRICE \$335

URL www.eyo.com.au

In spite of zero OEM support and a tiny advertising budget, Abit has thrived in the face of big players like Aopen and Asus. The BX6, based around the BX chipset, was an overclockers wet dream. Revolutionary features like SoftMenu and Vcore adjustment set the BX6 apart.

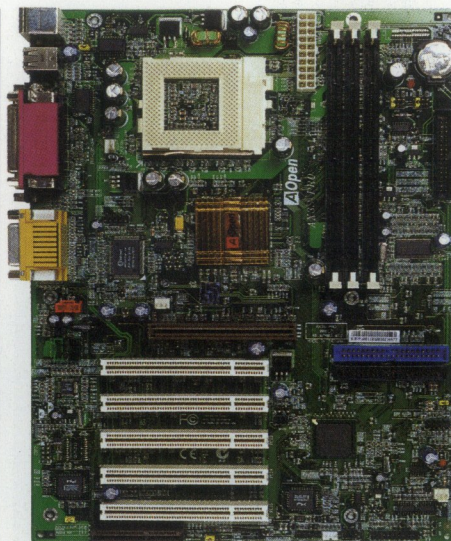
Abit has continued this pioneering tradition; it was, for example, the first company to integrate RAID and ATA/66 to a motherboard. While other manufacturers now include a token amount of overclocking features, Abit remains the undisputed maestro of overclocking.

The SA6-R offers a generous six PCI slots, as well as the obligatory CNR slot. The i815E chipset includes native ATA/100 support. However, Abit has gone further, adding a HighPoint HPT370 controller. This provides the SA6-R with a total of four IDE connectors, allowing for a maximum of eight IDE devices! The HPT370 chip is also RAID compatible (Redundant Array of Independent Disks), providing support for the RAID 0, RAID 1 and RAID 0 + 1 standards.

RAID is a way of storing the same data in different places (thus, redundantly) on multiple hard drives. By placing data on multiple disks, I/O operations can overlap, improving performance. Multiple disks increase the mean time between failure. A RAID array appears to Windows as a single hard drive. Although RAID won't appeal to the budget conscious (as it requires two or more identical hard disks), it does have a major impact upon real-world disk performance and data safety.

The SA6-R offers everything a Pentium III user could want - blazing disk performance, expandability and huge overclockability.

PCPP



AOPEN

AX3S PRO

DISTRIBUTOR Servex Australia 02. 8762 3520

PRICE \$329

URL www.servex.com.au

Aopen is a subsidiary of the massive Acer group. Aopen products have a reputation within the industry for superb build quality and impeccable engineering. The 'Pro' series of motherboards are intended for enthusiasts, and can be differentiated by the 24K gold heatsink, Vcore adjustment, low ESR capacitors and AOpen's DieHard BIOS.

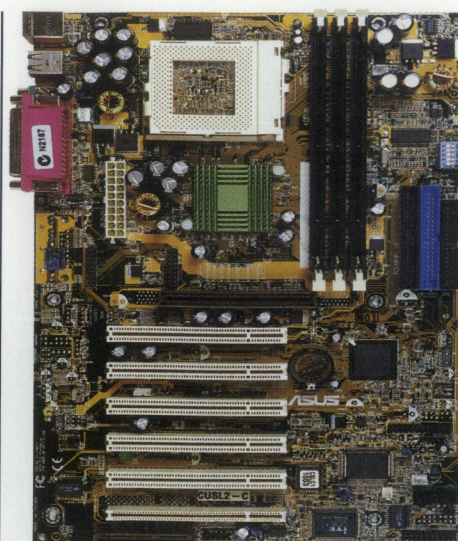
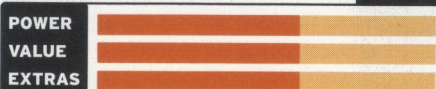
The AX3S Pro is unquestionably the best-looking motherboard we've seen. Not only is it impeccably finished, but the i815E chipset sports a nifty gold heatsink. Despite Aopen's claims, the gold heatsink has zero functional benefits. A well thought-out 175-page manual is a highlight, covering all features thoroughly, as well as describing in-detail each BIOS function.

The DieHard BIOS is a novel feature. If your computer contracts a BIOS corrupting virus (CIH, most notably), you can simply revert to a 'rescue' BIOS stored in ROM. The AX3S Pro is also a proficient overclocker. Configuration of settings is achieved within the BIOS, reflecting the board's almost jumper-less design. It's no SoftMenu III, but it should satisfy even the more avid overclockers. Hardware Monitoring is provided through a Winbond chip.

Expansion is rather limited. Five PCI slots are barely acceptable. The board has a mere two IDE channels. One IDE channel has official Ultra ATA/100 support, while the other is limited to ATA/66. The IDE connectors are badly positioned, encouraging 'ribbon-snarl'. Also, a full-length card placed in the top PCI slot could, conceivably, block access to these slots.

Sadly, aesthetics alone aren't enough to justify this board, it's pricey, and doesn't offer all the features found in the competition.

PCPP



ASUS

CUSL2-C

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288

PRICE \$285

URL www.achieva.com.au

While the original CUSL2 used the i815E chipset, the CUSL2-C uses the brand-new i815EP chipset. In a bid to keep costs at a minimum, the i815EP ditches support for integrated video. This is widely regarded as a plus, as no serious user ever enables onboard video, instead opting for a proper AGP adaptor. Also the integrated Intel i752 graphics engine used on Intel 815E chipset is extremely slow, and encroaches upon your system SDRAM, making it unsuitable for gamers.

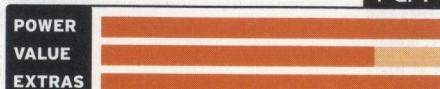
The CUSL2-C uses a fairly conventional layout, with an impressive six PCI slots and the usual CNR connector. Unlike the original CUSL2, the CUSL2-C features a standard AGP slot, rather than an AGP Pro connector.

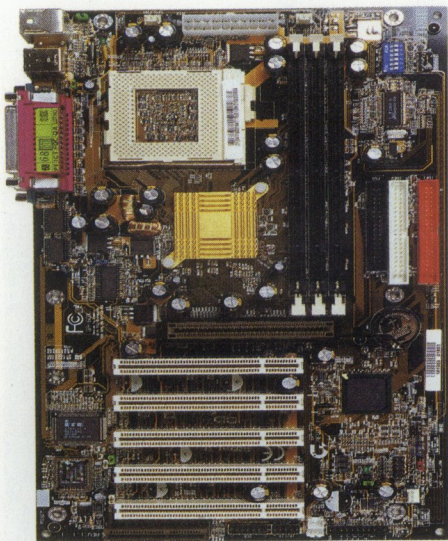
Two USB ports are mounted on the rear of the mainboard, and an additional two can be placed in a spare PCI slot using the included Asus break-out board. Only two IDE connectors are available. Without an additional Promise/Highpoint controller, the CUSL2-C has room for only four IDE devices. For most, thankfully, this will prove quite satisfactory. Onboard audio is also provided, care of the AC97 software audio codec. This is highly CPU intensive, and should be disabled immediately in favour of a dedicated PCI sound board.

Build quality, as you would expect from Asus, is excellent and the board has a reassuringly solid feeling. Stability is equally impressive, even while overclocking.

For Pentium III users, the CUSL2-C should feature high on your shopping list. It offers a compelling mix of features, backed up by Asus' famed reliability.

PCPP





GIGABYTE

GA-60X

DISTRIBUTOR Synnex Australia 1300 651 665

PRICE \$220

URL www.synnex.com.au

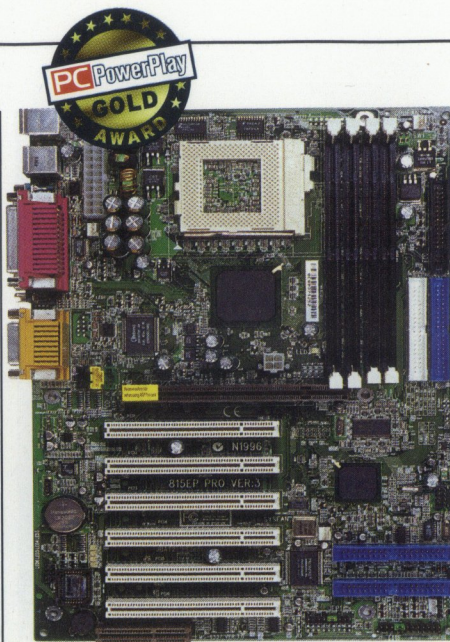
Gigabyte is the world's largest motherboard manufacturer, selling most of its product direct to major OEMs. With this in mind, the company has never felt compelled to woo the enthusiast market. Its boards are renowned for reliability and ease-of-use, rather than exciting features.

The GA-60X is a basic, no-frills board, based on the i815EP chipset. There are five PCI slots and a CNR slot. No ISA expansion is provided. Three DIMM slots are available for upgrading system memory. There are only two IDE connectors, allowing for a maximum of four IDE devices.

Overclocking options are spartan and badly implemented. Rather than offering overclocking options through the BIOS, users must rely on finicky DIP-switches. Overclocking enthusiasts will find this a cumbersome and tedious process. However, the GA60X does support Gigabyte's EasyTune III. Conceptually, EasyTune is similar to SoftFSB. Several major problems surface with this method: most importantly, users cannot make adjustments to the CPU core voltage; also, crashes caused by overclocking in Windows can, potentially, cause serious data corruption.

Further put-offs include the bizarre board layout, which makes it impossible to mount a large heatsink or fan. Because of extraneous capacitors, our GlobalWin FOP38 and SuperORB coolers failed to fit in the minimal room provided.

Despite the addition of EasyTune III, the Gigabyte GA-60X is functionally identical to the Intel D815EEA reference board. It's an unexciting product, which pales in comparison to the likes of the Abit SA6-R and the Asus CUSL2-C. Highly forgettable.



MSI

815EP PRO-R

DISTRIBUTOR MSI Australia 02 9748 0070

PRICE \$315

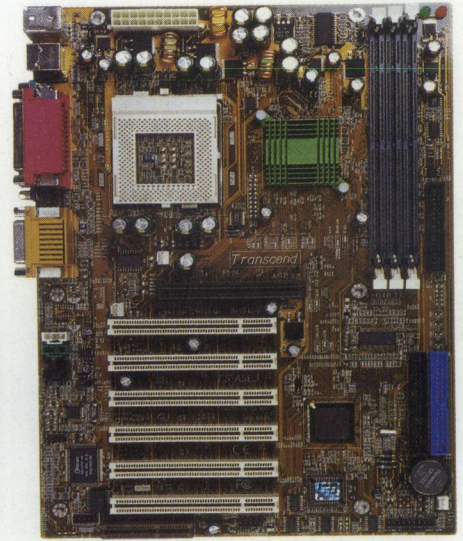
URL www.msi.com.au

The Pro-R is MSI's flagship board for Socket-370 processors. It's much more than a plain i815EP board. Features like D-Led, PC2PC connectivity, AGP-Pro, six PCI slots, four DIMM slots and the Promise FastTrack PDC20265R RAID controller really distinguish this board from the pack.

PC2PC, which provides USB home networking without the need for dedicated network cards, is another impressive addition to the motherboards portfolio. Although PC2PC is limited to two PCs, it's perfect for Internet sharing and as an inexpensive home LAN. The driver supports TCP/IP and IPX/SPX protocols, making it suitable for gamers. Although USB connection is limited to only 12MB/s, it should prove satisfactory for most uses. The GeneLink PC2PC controller is connected through the on-board USB headers. A USB bracket adaptor along with a USB cable is supplied with the motherboard.

The Promise RAID controller (also found on the Asus A7V133) supports standard UDMA/100 storage devices, allowing for a maximum of eight IDE devices to be connected. It also can perform RAID 0 or 1 if you have two or more identical devices installed on the controller. With RAID, you can increase I/O performance (with striping) as well as provide redundancy (mirroring) to your precious data.

Overclocking is simple with the jumper-less FSB and voltage selection in the BIOS. The bus frequency can be selected in increments of 1MHz to facilitate minor clock adjustments. The innovative 815E Pro-R has it all: not only is it a formidable overclocker, but it is crammed with useful and value-enhancing features.



TRANSCEND

TS-ASL3

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288

PRICE \$245

URL www.achieva.com.au

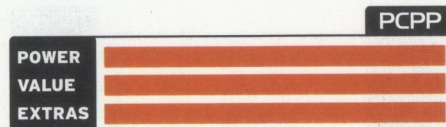
Despite producing memory modules since 1998, Transcend is a relatively new entrant to the motherboard market. The TS-ASL3 is a rather unadventurous i815e board, characteristic of a manufacturer still finding its feet.

The ASL3 features six PCI slots, allowing for plenty of expansion. The CNR slot, located at the bottom of the PCB, must share a bay with the last PCI slot. Although it is not mentioned in the manual, the Award BIOS does include some basic FSB and Vcore adjustment options. Setting different front side bus speeds first involves setting a jumper block on the PCB, to notify the system whether or not it's working with a 66, 100, or 133MHz processor. For 133MHz Coppermine processors, users can then set the FSB speed from 133 to 166MHz in 1MHz increments through the BIOS. Similarly, for 100MHz processors (Celeron 800+), the FSB can be shifted from 100 to 132MHz, again in 1MHz increments.

Included with the board is a well-written 61 page manual (surprisingly, all in English), a driver CD, and additional IDE/floppy cables. There is also a spare serial header, as the onboard 15-pin VGA connector displaces the typical second serial port. Although the board also features a standard USB header, for connecting 2 more USB ports, Transcend has opted not to include the backplate.

ATA/100 hard disk support is also included, as well as PC Health Monitoring courtesy of the WinBond hardware monitoring chipset.

The ASL3 is not the most thrilling board, but it doesn't miss a trick either. At the low price of \$245, it makes a worthy entry-level purchase.





ASUS P4T

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288

PRICE \$640

URL www.achieva.com.au

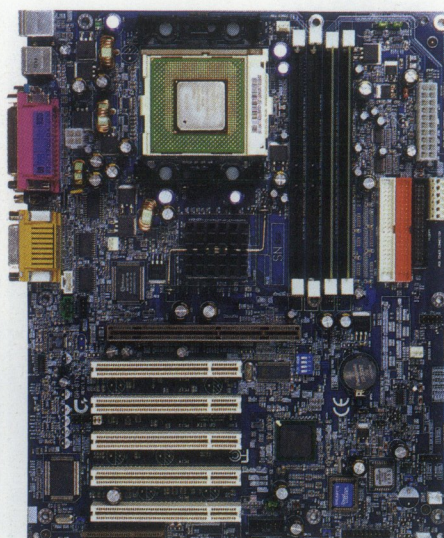
Overclockers, keen to wring every last MHz out of their Pentium 4 investment, will really appreciate the effort put into the Asus P4T. It's a very high quality board, only let down by an exorbitant price.

The design of the P4T is a significant departure from the D850GB reference board. AGP Pro is included, for use with high-end videocards. Only five PCI slots are available for expansion and the CNR slot is notably absent. We don't miss it. There are four RIMM slots for a maximum of 2GB memory. Note that RDRAM modules must be installed in pairs. Also, continuity modules must be placed in any unused slots.

Most Pentium 4 motherboards require a special case to comply with the specifications and requirements of the new platform. The Pentium 4 requires additional structural support for the massive heatsink. The P4T, however, circumvents this problem by including a patented easy conversion kit for standard ATX cases.

As with all Asus boards, overclocking can be carried out through either the DIP switches or the system BIOS. The Pentium 4, like its predecessors, has a locked multiplier, and overclocking is only possible by increasing the frequency of the system bus. The BIOS gives users 13 frequency values to choose from.

The P4T offers performance typical of any i850 board. Nevertheless, by harnessing the overclocking abilities of this board, users can buy a lower clocked P4, and push it to new limits. In our tests, the P4 has proved rather amenable to overclocking, making the low-cost 1.3GHz Pentium 4 a very attractive possibility. If you are adamant that a Pentium 4 solution is for you, the P4T will provide the best possible foundation.



GIGABYTE GA-8TX

DISTRIBUTOR Synnex Australia 1300 651 665

PRICE \$459

URL www.synnex.com.au

First of all, this board's electric blue PCB looks great, despite have zero bearing on performance. In fact, it looks even better when coupled with the blue Hercules 3D Prophet videocard.

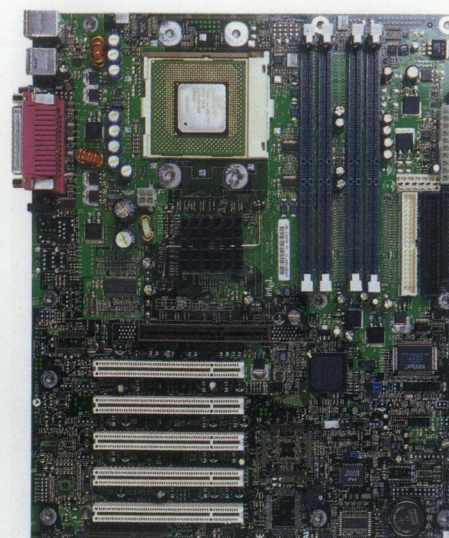
Besides the addition of an AGP Pro slot, the GA-8TX is virtually identical to the Intel D850GB reference board. 5 PCI slots, an AGP Pro connector and a CNR slot are provided for expansion. There are also four RIMM slots and two IDE connectors, offering ATA/100 support.

The onboard CT5880 Creative hardware chip is a good bonus. It's a much better solution than the usual AC '97 software audio codec, providing all the functionality of the SoundBlaster 128, including 4-speaker support and SPDIF output.

The GA-8TX has physically two system BIOS chips on the motherboard. One is the Main BIOS, and the other acts as a backup BIOS. Under normal circumstances, the system boots and works from the Main BIOS. If the Main BIOS is corrupted or damaged, either through a failed BIOS flashing attempt or a BIOS virus, the Backup BIOS can take over.

Overclocking options are very limited. There are four selectable FSB frequencies, which can be set through DIP switches: 100, 105, 110 and 133 MHz. Although the manual lists the EasyTune III application as applicable to the GA-8TX, the software bundled with our board didn't appear to support the clock generator used by the i850, rendering it essentially redundant.

The Gigabyte GA-8TX is an acceptable product, offering excellent stability, and a low price. However, the absence of viable overclocking options is a serious detractor to this newcomer.



INTEL D850GB

DISTRIBUTOR Intel Australia 1300 363 018

PRICE \$599

URL www.intel.com.au

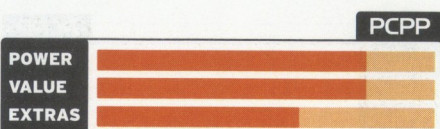
The D850GB is the Intel reference board for the Pentium 4, found in the Dell Dimension and Gateway Performance Pentium 4 systems. The D850GB is a simple design, best suited to workstations where price is secondary to stability and compatibility.

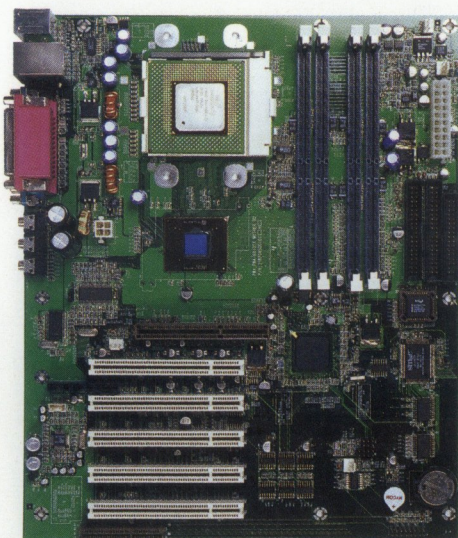
With the exception of dual-channel RAMBUS support, the i850 chipset has a fairly unexceptional feature set. There is AGP 4x, as well as ATA/100 and USB support. The i850 also incorporates core logic for software modems, the AC '97 audio codec and a software LAN port. Onboard Audio and LAN are optional with this board; although integrated peripherals are cheap, they are not recommended for gamers, as they can have a detrimental impact upon performance.

The i850 runs a 400MHz Quad Pumped system bus to the processor. Apparently, this generates a substantial amount of heat. A large heatsink is mounted above the North Bridge to maximise heat dissipation. There are four RIMM connectors, allowing up to 2GB of Rambus memory to be installed (assuming you are using 512MB modules). There are five PCI slots and a solitary CNR connector.

Intel's Rapid BIOS Boot system is worth noting. This technology, which must be enabled in the BIOS, speeds up the Power on Self-Test (POST), dramatically lowering boot times. With Rapid Boot enabled, the system boots significantly quicker than any Pentium 3 or Athlon system we have tested.

Being Intel, there are *zero* overclocking options for this mainboard. The D850GB is a highly conservative board, let down by a high price and conventional feature set. Best left to OEMs and the terminally boring.





MITAC

6810TX

DISTRIBUTOR DWG Tech 02 9699 0708

PRICE TBA

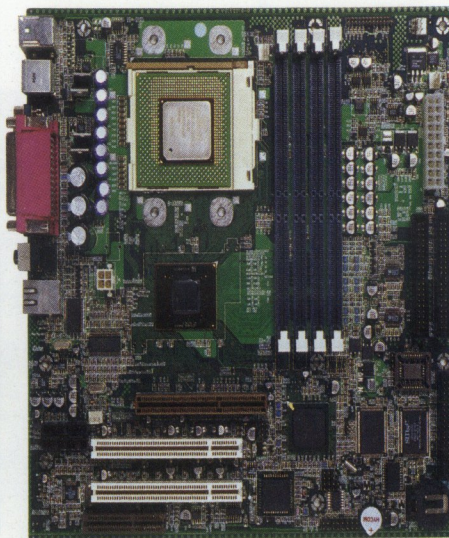
URL www.mitac.com

Like every other Pentium 4 board we've seen, the Mitac 6810TX features four RIMM slots, two ATA/100 compatible IDE slots, and a floppy connector. There are also five PCI slots, as well as an AGP and CNR slot.

Besides the onboard Ethernet adaptor, there is very little to distinguish this board from the pack. The networking socket is clearly aimed at the corporate market, who consider onboard 10/100 Ethernet as an essential feature. The adaptor is software based, much like the onboard AC '97 audio, meaning it has an impact upon system performance - to perform certain calculations, processing must be offloaded to the CPU. Networking and audio codecs are not recommended for gamers, who should invest in dedicated PCI-based hardware. Besides software incompatibilities and a limited feature set, software codecs can cause unpredictable fluctuations in frame rate.

Mitac sell most of its product to OEMs, so it shouldn't surprise that the 6810TX is free of overclocking options. The board is almost completely jumper-free, and the BIOS only offers a few token 'tweaking' options. These are limited to memory timing settings. Oddly, the i850 chipset, which gets notoriously hot, is sold without the usual heatsink. Stability doesn't seem to suffer, although we would feel more reassured with some form of passive cooling. Otherwise, the board layout is neat, if rather uninspired. The transistors are kept at a healthy distance from the Socket, allowing a sizeable heatsink and fan to be installed. Although, without any overclocking options, this should be unnecessary.

This is a singularly uninteresting board. Smart shoppers will avoid.



MITAC

MICRO-6810UX

DISTRIBUTOR DWG Tech 02 9699 0708

PRICE TBA

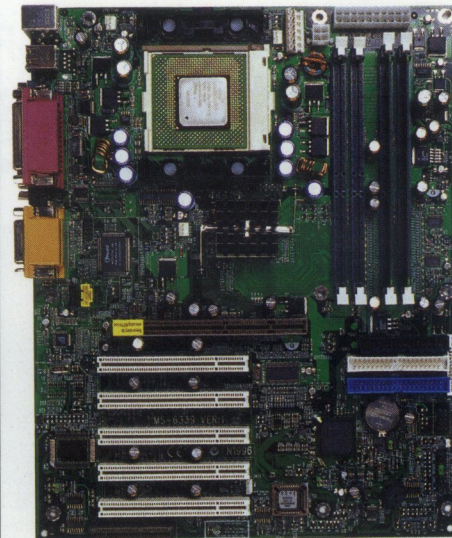
URL www.mitac.com

There's a paucity of Pentium 4 boards on the market, so this Micro-ATX solution from Mitac is a rather surprising find. Micro-ATX is a reduced form-factor, for installing in small Micro-ATX compliant cases and network appliances.

The Mitac 6810UX comes with a mere two PCI slots and a CNR port. Even the most basic computer users will have no trouble using both these ports. The CNR is virtually redundant, as there are virtually no CNR devices available. A credible four RIMM slots are available for up to 2GBs of Direct RDRAM memory. Four ATA/100 devices can be connected to the two available IDE slots.

Audio is provided care of an onboard Creative sound solution. This should alleviate some of the expansion woes, allowing users to free up a PCI slot which, otherwise, would have been used by a dedicated PCI soundcard. The Creative chip uses the same design as a Sound Blaster PCI128, providing all of the functionality of a proper PCI sound board. Serious gamers, however, should invest in something more high-end, like the SoundBlaster Live!

The 6810UX is a bizarre product. The P4, clearly aimed at the high-end workstation and gamer market, is unsuited to a Micro-ATX form-factor. The demographic prepared to lash out on a Pentium 4 are unlikely to want to sacrifice expandability for a reduced form-factor. In addition, the Pentium 4 requires a large, specialised Power Supply unit for stable operation. Most Micro-ATX chassis, on the other hand, feature a paltry 145W power output. The Pentium 4 also demands a large heatsink and fan unit, which will not fit in most Micro-ATX cases.



MSI

850 PRO

DISTRIBUTOR MSI Australia 02 9748 0070

PRICE \$579

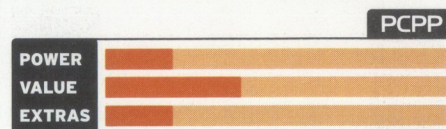
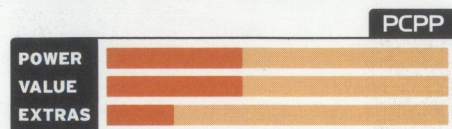
URL www.msi.com.au

Also known as the MS-6339, the MSI 850 Pro is the latest entrant into the i850 market. With five PCI slots, one CNR, and one AGP Pro slot, the 850 Pro feature set mirrors the Intel D850GB reference board. And, despite some minor layout difference like AGP Pro, the boards look almost identical.

The most notable discrepancy is that the IDE and floppy connectors are rotated 90 degrees from the norm, and located beneath the RIMM slots. This makes installing IDE devices a pain, as the ribbons must be twisted in order to fit.

One of the biggest problems for Pentium 4 system integrators are the modifications required for an ATX case to fit the new platform. The Pentium 4 reference design requires a one-pound copper heatsink, active cooled with aluminium fins. Because the weighty heatsink could destroy motherboards during shipment, special heatsink bracing mechanisms are necessary to stop the motherboard from flexing. While Asus tackles this problem by including a metal plate to mount the board on pre ATX 2.03 cases, both the MSI 850 Pro and Gigabyte GA-8TX still require an ATX 2.03-compliant chassis. To make the situation worse, ATX 2.03 cases are notoriously tough to find, particularly here in Australasia.

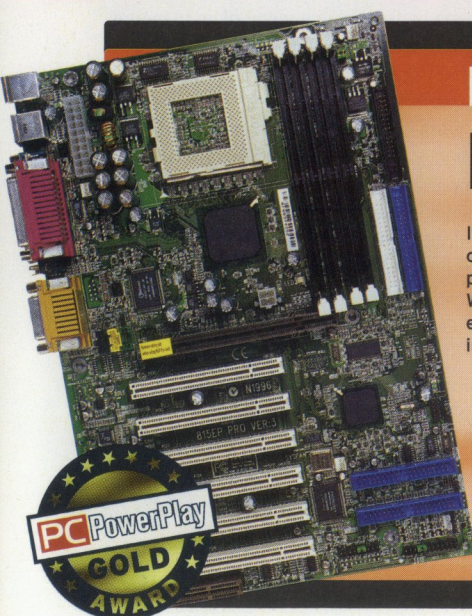
With no DIP switches or pertinent BIOS options, the 850 Pro must be overclocked using MSI's patented Fuzzy Logic software utility. At the time of writing, Fuzzy Logic 2 remains incompatible with the 850 Pro, although MSI claims this will be rectified in the near future with an updated build. MSI also hopes to offer a revised BIOS with some overclocking options within the next month. Like all the other i850 boards reviewed, stability and build quality are excellent.



MOTHERBOARD TECH SPECS

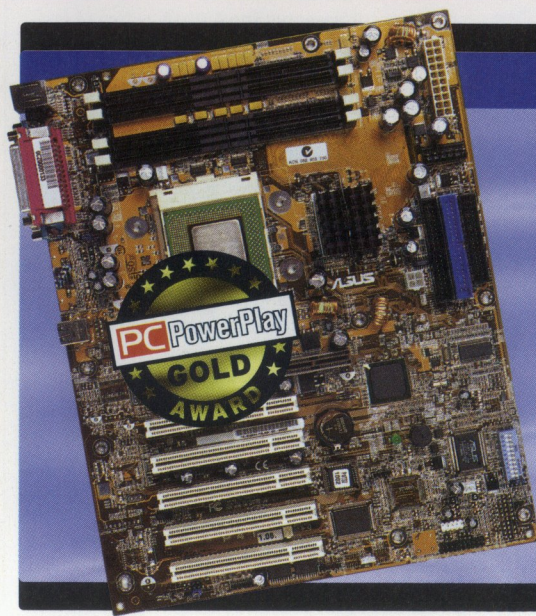
	KT7A-RAID	AK73 PRO	A7V133	GA-7ZX	K7TR TURBO	TS-AKT4	SA6-R	AX3S PRO	CUSL2-C
MANUFACTURER	ABIT	AOpen	ASUS	Gigabyte	MSI	Transcend	ABIT	AOpen	ASUS
DISTRIBUTOR	EYO Tech	Servex	Achieva	Synnex	MSI Australia	Achieva	EYO Tech	Servex	Achieva
PHONE	02 9822 2550	02 8762 3520	02 9742 3288	1300 651 665	02 9748 0070	02 9742 3288	02 9822 2550	02 8762 3520	02 9742 3288
PRICE	\$366	\$319	\$335	\$299	\$336	\$230	\$335	\$329	\$285
URL	www.eyo.com	www.servex.com	www.achieva.com	www.synnex.com	www.msi.com.tw	www.achieva.com	www.eyo.com	www.servex.com	www.achieva.com
CHIPSET	KT133A	KT133	KT133A	KT133	KT133A	KT133	i815E	i815E	i815EP
SOCKET	SocketA	SocketA	SocketA	SocketA	SocketA	SocketA	Socket370	Socket370	Socket370
MAX RAM	1.5Gb	1.5Gb	1.5Gb	1.5Gb	1.5Gb	1.5Gb	512Mb	512Mb	512Mb
RAM SLOTS	3	3	3	3	3	3	4	3	3
PCI SLOTS	6	5	5	5	6	5	6	5	6
ISA SLOTS	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
CNR SLOTS	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
IDE SOCKETS	4	2	4	4	4	2	4	2	2
USB PORTS	2	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	4
INTEGRATED AUDIO	No	AC '97	AC '97	CT5880	AC '97	AC '97	AC '97	AC '97	AC '97
INTEGRATED VIDEO	No	No	No	No	No	No	i752	i752	i752
AGP PRO	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
RAID	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No

GOLD AWARDS



PENTIUM III MSI 815EP PRO-R

It is a tight run between the Asus, Abit and MSI boards. All of these boards are testament to the maturity of the i815e platform. However, the MSI does pip the others slightly. With features like PC2PC, an onboard RAID controller and every overclocking option conceivable, it is a really impressive board.

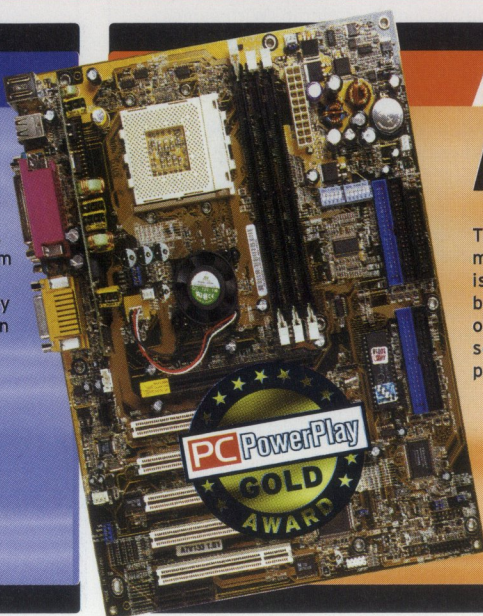


MOTHERBOARD TECH SPECS

	GA-60X	PRO-R	TS-ASL3	P4T	GA-8TX	D850GB	6810TX	6810UX	850 PRO
MANUFACTURER	Gigabyte	MSI	Transcend	ASUS	Gigabyte	Intel	Mitac	Mitac	MSI
DISTRIBUTOR	Synnex	MSI Australia	Achieva	Achieva	Synnex	Intel Australia	Mitac	Mitac	MSI Australia
PHONE	1300 651 665	02 9748 0070	02 9742 3288	02 9742 3288	1300 651 665	1300 363 018	N/A	N/A	02 9748 0070
PRICE	\$220	\$315	\$245	\$640	\$459	\$599	TBA	TBA	\$579
URL	www.synnex.com	www.msi.com.tw	www.achieva.com	www.achieva.com	www.synnex.com	www.intel.com	www.mitac.com	www.mitac.com	www.msi.com.tw
CHIPSET	i815EP	i815EP	i815E	i850	i850	i850	i850	i850	i850
SOCKET	Socket370	Socket370	Socket370	Socket423	Socket423	Socket423	Socket423	Socket423	Socket423
MAX RAM	512Mb	512Mb	512Mb	2Gb	2Gb	2Gb	2Gb	2Gb	2Gb
RAM SLOTS	3	4	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
PCI SLOTS	5	6	6	5	5	5	5	2	5
ISA SLOTS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
CNR SLOTS	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1
IDE SOCKETS	2	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
USB PORTS	2	3	2	4	2	4	2	2	2
INTEGRATED AUDIO	No	AC '97	AC '97	No	CT5880	No	AC '97	CT5880	No
INTEGRATED VIDEO	No	No	i752	No	No	No	No	No	No
AGP PRO	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
RAID	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

PENTIUM 4 ASUS P4T

Asus has run laps around the competition. The P4T is the most overclockable Pentium 4 board, which should help maximise the high P4 investment. It is also stable, sturdy and the only P4 board in our tests that can mount a standard ATX case without modification.



AMD ATHLON ASUS A7V133

The A7V133 features all the latest bells and whistles, matched with ASUS' formidable reputation for quality. It is a close call between the KT7A-RAID and the A7V133, but ultimately the impressive stability and build quality of the A7V133 wins through. In fact, we like the A7V133 so much, that we're using it as the principal testing platform in the PCPP bunker.

BUDGET CPU SHOWDOWN!

THE RACE-IN THE LOW COST CPU MARKET CONTINUES. RECENTLY, INTEL RELEASED THE 800MHZ CELERON AND, LIKE CLOCKWORK, AMD FOLLOWED SUIT, RELEASING THE DURON AT 850MHZ. AMD, IT SEEMS, ARE KEEN TO REMAIN SPEED KING IN THE VALUE MARKET. WHICH CPU DOES PCPP ENDORSE FOR LOW COST SYSTEM ASSEMBLERS?

INTEL CELERON 800MHZ

The Celeron has been around for over two years, and is marketed as a low-cost alternative to the Pentium III for use in basic PC systems. The Celeron has carved a niche for itself amongst performance enthusiasts, due to its amenability to overclocking. The first Celeron was introduced in 1998, using the Covington core. To keep costs to a minimum, the Celeron was essentially a Pentium II without any L2 cache. The next incarnation of the Celeron, codenamed Mendocino, featured 128k of L2 cache, giving it a much needed performance boost.

The current Celeron uses the Coppermine128 core, adding SSE extensions and a 256-bit Advanced Transfer Cache. Both the Pentium III and the Celeron are produced on the same production line, and assembled from the same wafers. They featured identical cores, except the Celeron has half the memory disabled. While the Pentium III packs 256k of L2 cache, the Celeron features a mere 128k of L2 cache. This has a severe impact on the Celeron's performance - even when using the same FSB and clock speed as the Pentium III, the Celeron cannot compete.

With the release of the Celeron 800, Intel's budget CPU solution now features a 100Mhz FSB, giving it a hefty performance boost over its 66Mhz brethren. PCPP has always castigated Intel for the Celeron's measly 66Mhz Front Side Bus. In our previous Duron vs Celeron comparison (PCPP#54), we stated "...while a 66Mhz FSB may have been sufficient when used in conjunction with an ancient 266Mhz processor, it does a disservice to modern 700+Mhz CPUs." Intel's belated decision to substitute a 66Mhz FSB for the 100Mhz alternative goes a long way to reducing the memory bottleneck plaguing the Celeron.

However, it seems a case of too little, too late. The Duron's impressive 200Mhz FSB (100Mhz double-pumped) still offers twice the available memory bandwidth of the Celeron. With games pushing memory bandwidth requirements to the limit, the Duron has a clear advantage. Also, the 200Mhz FSB featured on the Duron helps minimise the performance penalty incurred during cache misses. Both the Celeron and the Duron have comparatively small caches, so the frequency of cache misses is much higher than in their more-expensive siblings. The restrictive 100Mhz Front Side Bus of the Celeron really exacerbates the downside of a small, 4-way associative cache.

AND THE WINNER IS...

From a performance standpoint, the Celeron architecture has reached the end of the line. Despite the increased FSB, the Celeron is consistently thrashed by the Duron, at a much lower price. The only people who should consider the Celeron are those still running a system based around the BX chipset. If you don't really have the dosh to invest in a new KT133 board, the Celeron makes a simple upgrade. At 800Mhz, it provides adequate performance, and provides a real kick-in-the-pants for PII and PIII Katmai owners. Obviously, the Duron 850 is the answer. It offers workstation level performance for a minimal outlay. Couple this with a GeForce 2 MX, and you have a seriously potent system for a digestible price.

Socket A AMD systems also offer a superior upgrade path. Because the Duron is a low-voltage derivative of the Athlon, we can expect speeds to ramp up towards 1Ghz for the coming year. The Morgan core, which features a much cooler design, should allow the Duron to move beyond the 1.2Ghz mark. A KT133A based motherboard is perhaps the best choice for system builders; not only will it run Duron processors with a 200Mhz FSB, but you will also be able to plug in an Athlon with 266Mhz FSB down the track.

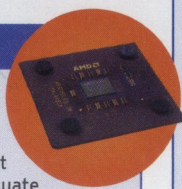
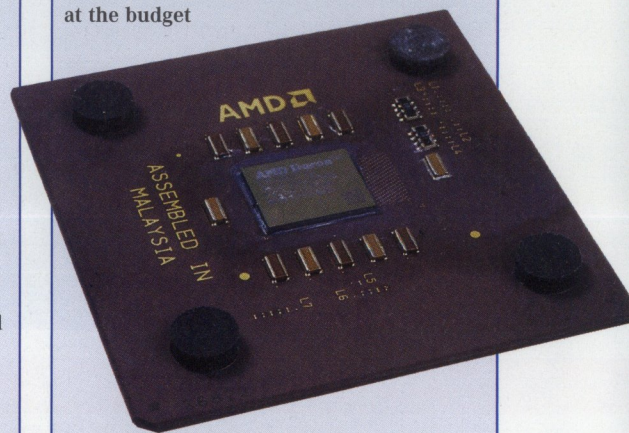
Hugh Norton-Smith

AMD DURON 850MHZ

Besides the formidable clock-speed, the Duron 850 is nothing unusual. It still features all the advantages of the Athlon core, including the 200Mhz EV6 FSB, 3Dnow! extensions and the superscalar FPU. For a CPU aimed at the budget

market, it's wildly fast. Unlike the Celeron, the Duron isn't merely a bastardised Athlon; it is, in fact, a completely different chip manufactured on a separate production line.

The Duron has 64kb of full-speed L2 cache, which is only half as much as the Celeron. This is offset, however, by the massive 128kb of L1 cache. This is four times as much L1 cache as found in the Celeron and Pentium III. So, in total, the Duron has 192k of available on-chip cache, in comparison to the Celeron's lower 160kb of cache. Another major benefit of the Duron's advanced cache architecture is that its L1 and L2 cache are exclusive. The Celeron, on the other hand, duplicates the entire contents of L1 cache in the L2 cache. Ultimately, then, the Duron has 192kb of usable cache, whereas the Celeron has only 128kb of available cache.



COMPAQ

PRESARIO 5000 INTERNET PC

DISTRIBUTOR Compaq **PRICE** \$1999 **URL** www.compaq.com.au

Before examining Compaq's latest all-in-one system, it's important to realise that the Presario 5000 is, as advertised, an Internet PC. Its specifications and design philosophy reflect its function as a Web browser and Home Office package. This is not a gaming PC by any means. But when spending \$1999 on a PC, an expectation of the system to perform adequately as an all-purpose machine is reasonable. So, if you don't have time for hardcore gaming, or if you have no interest in advanced 3D titles, is the Presario 5000 a good buy? Perhaps for the family, but certainly not for enthusiasts.

Compaq is one of the first of the large manufacturers to use the AMD Duron in its PCs. This Presario has a Duron 700 under the hood, a cheap processor, but still a performer in desktop applications and 2D games such as Red Alert 2 and Diablo 2.

The PC runs Windows Me, and comes with a 20Gb Seagate U Series 5 hard drive (reviewed overleaf) and 64Mb of PC-100 RAM. While the hard drive is quite generous for a low-end system, 64Mb RAM seriously affects performance. Windows Me is a notoriously memory-hungry operating system, and yes, 64Mb RAM will let you run a bare desktop with only a little slowdown. But if more than three or four applications are open - say Word, Internet Explorer, a mail client and Napster - the Presario 5000 will take several seconds changing between active windows, and the little hourglass we know so well spends far too much time on screen. Also, the much vaunted faster boot of Windows Me is effectively crippled by this paucity of RAM.

The videocard is another embarrassment for Compaq. The PC giant has chosen to use an nVidia Vanta AGP adaptor. When we first took the back off the Presario and Hugh caught sight of the word Vanta stamped on the card, he fairly climbed the walls in his fury. His rant against Compaq was not the most balanced and fair of criticisms, but it was perfectly understandable. The Vanta chipset, with only eight megabytes - count them, eight - of video RAM, has trouble keeping up with even the

simplest of current 3D games. 2D quality is perfectly acceptable - this is an nVidia card after all. But Quake3 barely managed 800x600 at a decent framerate (our 3Dmark2000 test returned only 26.4 fps), and Giants only worked with view distance set to a minimum at 640x480 - which as Giants fans know, makes the game impossible to play.

The build quality of the Presario 5000 is without fault, with all cables tucked securely away, a solid case in white (death to the beige) and some plastic but inoffensive styling on the fascia. However, as Hugh intimated - all right, screamed - in his anti-Presario 5000 rant, it would perhaps have better behaved Compaq to spend more on 128Mb of RAM and a decent TNT2 videocard instead of the CD holder built into the front of the tower.

So does the Presario 5000 make up for past sins in the audio department? Unfortunately, audio is built-in to the motherboard, and only has outputs for a single 1/8th inch stereo jack. This is fine for system alerts and listening to MP3s in a cramped study before downloading them onto

GIMMICKSVILLE...

So we didn't get 128Mb of RAM, but who cares? We got a CD holder in the front of the tower! Which can hold not one, not two, not three but up to FIVE CDs! Hugh was personally insulted that Compaq implied he only owned five CDs. Then we placed bets on how many times we could click the CD holder open and closed before it broke. Then we fell asleep.

SYSTEM SPECS

PROCESSOR AMD Duron 700MHz
RAM 64Mb PC-100
MOTHERBOARD Compaq bespoke, VIA chipset
VIDEO nVidia Vanta 8Mb AGP
OPTICAL 40x CD-ROM
STORAGE Seagate U Series 5 5,400rpm 20Gb HDD, 3.5" Floppy
MODEM 56k PCI
MONITOR 15" 1280x1024 @ 60Hz
EXPANSION 3x PCI, 1x AGP, 1x AMR, 2x front USB, 2x rear USB, 2x serial, 1x parallel.

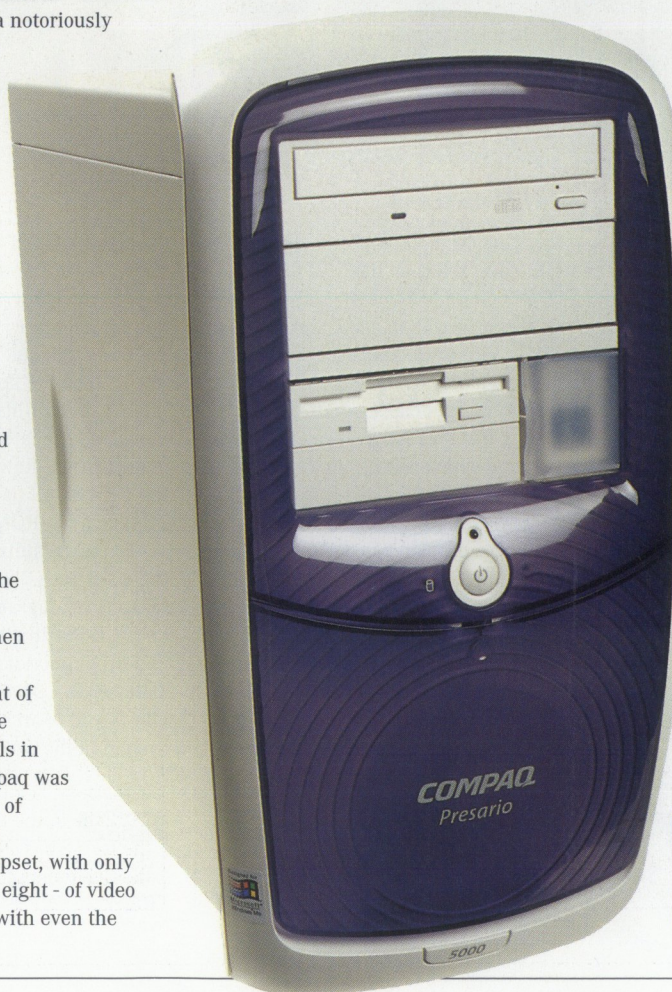
a Nomad Jukebox, but for pumpin' tunes, the Presario is never going to replace even a \$250 all-in-one shelf CD/tape/tuner by Kenwood.

To be fair to Compaq, for those buyers who need to know one hundred percent that a computer will work out of the box and probably never have to be serviced in at least the first two years of its life, the Presario 5000 is a sensible investment. And this is an Internet PC. It's written on the box: "Internet PC". A decent 56kbps modem is included, and Compaq's own Internet connection wizard makes hooking up to a new or existing ISP a breeze.

Once again though, 64Mb of memory affects how many browser windows you can have open at the one time. And for those who don't like IE, preferring for example Netscape 6, frustration and long load times are even more the order of the day.

In the areas of build quality and reliability, the Presario 5000 does very well. For instance, it never crashed once, despite being left on for an entire week and having a pile of really terrible budget games installed all over its virgin hard drive without mercy. But only 64Mb of memory, while boosting Compaq's sales margin on each unit, significantly affects this PC's performance, and prevents it from getting a higher score.

Anthony Fordham



PCPP

Very reliable, solid machine with a decent processor is let down by 64Mb RAM and a crap videocard

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Hotware Reviews

SEAGATE

CHEETAH 36XL AND U SERIES 5 HARD DISKS

DISTRIBUTOR Seagate Technology Australia 02 9725 3366 **PRICE** N/A **URL** www.seagate.com

The humble hard disk is hardly the most exciting component in a PC. So it is to Seagate's credit that it continues to produce exemplary drives that are, in many ways, quite exciting.

All of Seagate's new drives are now equipped with SeaShell and SeaShield technology. These two drive protection systems reduce the amount of damage a hard disk is susceptible to in normal, day-to-day operation. A transparent non-conductive shell prevents data loss from electrostatic-discharge, while a rubberised shock-absorbent protector around the whole unit reduces vulnerability to shock, and reduces damage from a 30cm fall by a factor of ten.

The Cheetah 36XL is a SCSI drive using the sinfully fast Ultra 160 interface. An alternate model of this drive supports the newer 2Gbit Fibre Channel interface, but serious cash has to be forked out for the average games PC to support this.

The drive spins at 10,000rpm, and has a seek time of only 5.2msec, so even Total Annihilation: Kingdoms should load at a decent speed off this drive. Also, a low power rating of a mere 9 watts means the Cheetah runs far cooler than other



drives of this speed and specification.

That doesn't mean the drive is frosty though, far from it. After a good hour's workout, the Cheetah is only just cool enough to touch comfortably. Overclocked systems already suffering from heat problems will need additional cooling to run this drive successfully. And of course, if you don't have onboard Ultra

160 SCSI (like so many of us here at PCPP do, ahem), a \$500-\$600 adaptor will be needed to get the most from this drive.

As for the U Series 5, well this is a far more modest component that focuses on quality and reliability over blistering performance. The U Series family, claims Seagate, is the most popular hard drive in history, and a quick poll of the PCPP office revealed Seagate drives in most of our precious home PCs, so maybe Seagate is right.

The spindle speed is only 5,400rpm, so perhaps a second 7,200rpm drive would work better as a boot drive, with the U Series 5 providing a launchpad for less HDD intensive games and office applications. Both these drives from Seagate are highly recommended for quality and reliability, and the Cheetah 36XL - if you can afford an Ultra 160 SCSI card - simply shines.

When you're thinking upgrade, think Seagate!

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

Quality drives, although the U Series 5 is only 5,400rpm, and the Cheetah 36XL needs Ultra 160 SCSI to really perform

84

YAMAHA

CRW2100E

DISTRIBUTOR Yamaha Music Australia 1800 682 705 **PRICE** \$599 **URL** www.yamaha.co.jp/english

Along with Plextor, Yamaha has a reputation for producing quality CD burners. The Yamaha CRW2100E is the fastest drive we've encountered, performing write operations at 16x, rewrites at 10x and reads at 40x. A 79-minute audio CD, for instance, can be created in approximately five minutes. The drive reviewed is the E-IDE variant, although SCSI and Firewire versions are available.

Until recently, SCSI was the interface of choice for CD burners. A SCSI channel can handle up to 256 simultaneous requests. This is much more efficient than IDE, which can handle only one request at a time, and must block other

requests until the original request is done. An IDE controller also relies on the CPU to negotiate I/O communications. Because of these limitations, IDE drives often encounter the dreaded buffer under-run. This occurs when the source drive cannot feed data to the CD-RW fast enough. When this happens, a coaster is produced. Plextor and Creative have eliminated buffer underruns with a technology call Burn Proof, while TDK uses a similar technique branded FailSafe technology. Both these techniques allow a drive to pause whilst burning a CD without returning a coaster.

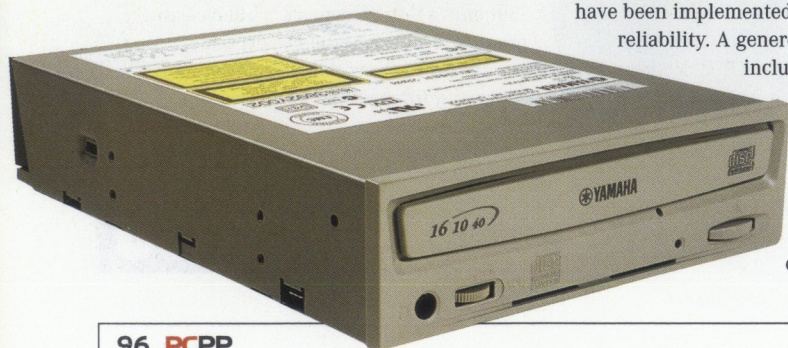
Although Yamaha hasn't licensed any of these proprietary technologies, several features have been implemented to maximise drive reliability. A generous 8Mb buffer is

included, which minimises the chance of buffer under-runs. This provides added insurance for users accustomed to multi-tasking and accessing other IDE devices.

Also included is a feature called Optimum Write Speed Control, which matches the media type to the CD writing speed. For instance, if you attempt to write at 16x with a no-name 4x gold, the Yamaha drive will automatically lower the write speed in order to protect the quality of the finished CD. All buyers should download the latest BIOS, which enables genuine DAO-Raw support. DAO-RAW allows the CRW2100E to make perfect copies of protected CD-ROMs when using CloneCD.

The usual suite of Adaptec software is included. EasyCD Creator is a basic CD mastering program. DirectCD lets you access your CD-RW like a hard disk, allowing for drag-and-drop functionality. Finally, Adaptec TakeTwo is a system backup application, which allows you to archive the contents of your system in the event of a hard disk disaster.

Hugh Norton-Smith



PCPP

The Rolls Royce of CD Burners. Speedy, reliable and with an 8Mb buffer to prevent errors. Superb

90

COMPAQ

PRESARIO 1400 NOTEBOOK

DISTRIBUTOR Compaq **PRICE** \$4499 **URL** www.compaq.com

There comes a time in every gamer's life when they must down tools and leave the den for the great outdoors. To this end, Compaq has provided a notebook that is either stylish and funky, or a plastic monstrosity, depending heavily on the taste of the user.

A PIII 650MHz under the bonnet keeps your web browser and MP3 player zipping along very smartly, although a Trident graphics adaptor using 8Mb of system RAM is a little disappointing, given the popularity and performance of the ATi adaptors in more expensive notebooks.

Speaking of system RAM, the Presario 1400 comes with a very generous 128Mb, and even with 8Mb of that

swallowed by your video subsystem, it still leaves plenty of breathing space for numerous on-the-run type applications.

The unit comes with three Internet buttons for one-touch Web and email access, while a four-way scrolling key allows you to navigate web pages without having to struggle with the touch-pad. There are also specialised keys to launch and manage your preferred MP3 software, very useful for long bus trips and crush-hour on the

Parramatta Road.

The Presario 1400 is a legacy-free device, so no PS/2 ports are included. A

subtle panel on the back folds down to reveal two USB ports, monitor and S-video connectors, as well as the

ports for the built-in modem and ethernet card. The S-video connector seems a little unnecessary, and it would have been useful to have at least one PS/2 connector for a legacy mouse, as the touch pad is a fairly ungainly pointing device.

Finally though, this notebook is far too expensive. It's a trendy and casual PC, suitable for students and boutique owners, but at \$4500, it's priced in the professional range. If this was a \$3000 machine, it would be far more attractive.

Obviously, a notebook is never going to be your primary gaming machine, but you'll still need something to take on the road. While a sleek silver ultraportable weighing eight grams and costing eight grand is the dream, the Compaq Presario 1400 still remains a very pleasing, if expensive, reality.

Anthony Fordham



PCPP

Plastic and funky and plenty powerful for on-the-road action, but too expensive for such a casual machine

61

VIDEOLOGIC

HOME@M

DISTRIBUTOR Videologic 1800 067 722 **PRICE** \$295 **URL** www.videologic.com

The webcam market is dominated by Logitech, Intel and Creative, three companies offering a variety of products from budget pinhole cameras to deluxe, telephoto monstrosities requiring their own power supply and the blood of your firstborn. So it's good to see a quality camera, built to a sensible and useful specification, providing a welcome alternative to the Big Three of the webcam game.

A necessarily narcissistic device, the webcam has done much for distant grandmothers and amateur pornographers alike. The Videologic Home@m uses a USB interface, so setup is a breeze. The camera has a one-shot trigger on the top of the unit, and a built in microphone. An 1/8th inch connector plugs into the mic-in port of your soundcard, making the unit ideal for videophone calls and net conferencing.

Unlike the Intel webcams on offer, the Home@m has a stable and flexible base, allowing you to position the camera quite freely. A decent amount of weight in the camera's foot means the cable won't keep pulling it back to stare at the ceiling, as happens with so many other webcams.



Vision quality was good, if a little washed out on the two test PCs. The Home@m is packaged with a number of basic video capture utilities, including VidCap32. This program is fairly plain and unornamented, but it allows for single shot and video captures limited only by the size of your hard drive. The camera supports resolutions up to 640x480 and is plenty quick enough to capture video, although the picture is somewhat grainy even on the high quality setting.

But for a webcam, the overall picture quality is the best seen for quite a while. The Home@m is certainly superior to offerings from Logitech and especially Intel, with better colour and brighter images. Also, compared to the relatively labyrinthine installations for the two competing products, the Home@m's setup is simplicity itself, and it refrains from filling your hard drive with megabytes of useless 'share your holiday snaps with a Santa Claus border' type applications.

When it comes to ease of use, the Home@m doesn't hold your hand, and expects you to understand that you need to install the provided third-party software to actually capture images. And it's a little pricey. But for quality of image and ease of setup, the Videologic Home@m is definitely worth your extra cash.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

A solid camera with good picture quality. A lack of cutesy software is welcome relief for experienced users

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CANON

POWERSHOT PRO 90 IS

DISTRIBUTOR	Canon	PRICE	\$2799	URL	www.canon.com
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Before we start to explain how this is a fantastic camera that will render your old 35mm obsolete, take another look at the price. That's right. At a significant portion of \$3000, the Canon PowerShot Pro90 IS costs considerably more than a 21" Sony FD Trinitron monitor. Or an entire, very beefy PC. So because the price is so outrageously unrealistic, we have decided to disregard it. We just thought you should be aware that the score this camera has received does not take into account the \$3000 price tag.

But on with the review. This member of the PowerShot family is a 2.6 megapixel SLR camera for what Canon calls 'advanced' users. Indeed, a passing familiarity with the science, mechanics and indeed art of photography is an advantage when grappling with this mighty machine. Peering through the viewfinder shows exactly what the lens is seeing, so shot composition is spot-on every time, even for beginners.

Ergonomically the camera is little short of a triumph. Designed very similarly to a film-based SLR, the only real difference is that the lens is built into the camera housing. The weight and centre-of-balance is the same as a 35mm camera of similar specification. And unlike the Sony cameras, the PowerShot feels very solid, with a rubberised grip for the right hand disguising the all-plastic construction.

Point and shoot

On the fully automatic setting, photography couldn't be easier. Compose a shot, hold down the trigger halfway to focus and determine aperture and shutter speed, then press to shoot. The photo will be displayed for two seconds in the viewfinder,

and then the camera is ready for the next shot.

A fold-out LCD display can take the place of the viewfinder for those awkward shots. The screen can rotate through 180 degrees, so you can even compose a shot of yourself in front of the camera. In this way, the PowerShot Pro90 IS has the functionality of a video camera, allowing shots above the heads of a crowd and at awkward angles.

Examining the capabilities of the unit, it is clear this is not a professional machine by any means, but it should function adequately for all amateur and semi-professional situations. The lens has a focal length from 7 to 70 mm, and F-stop settings from 2.8 to 8.0, as you would expect. With the camera set to manual, shutter speed and aperture can be adjusted as on a film-based camera, giving photographers who know what they're doing plenty of scope to compose the shot they want. A 10x optical zoom is further enhanced by a 4x digital zoom, so for bugcatchers, this camera can get all those fiddly little antennae shots you crave.

As for connectivity, the Canon PowerShot family uses a USB interface, so hooking it to a PC is a breeze. And the speed! The camera is fantastically fast. There is no discernible delay when browsing shots on the camera, and it uploads through Canon's TWAIN software in a matter of mere seconds. The camera supports three resolutions; 1856 x 1392, 1024 x 768 and 640 x 480. Three compression modes further improve picture quality. In addition, the camera can be set to record images in a raw, uncompressed format, so the flash card will record exactly what the CCD sees, without any processing at all.

In love with Microsoft Imaging

The LCD screen on the camera can be a bit misleading when checking to see how a photo has come out, and the viewfinder cannot be used to browse. Particularly when photographing with the flash, images on the LCD seem washed out and look quite terrible, although when the shot is uploaded to the PC it looks just fine.



Also, the plug for the USB cable at the camera end is small and flimsy. It would be easy to break it on the fiftieth connection, and the release switch is quite stiff and leaves

you with a sore thumb after a day's photography.

We weren't able to run down the camera battery in a day, so there's plenty of juice for a full day's photography. A built in flash pops up automatically when light levels are low, although it does seem to be ultra sensitive and a bit overpowered, so experienced photographers will probably disable it for most daytime shots.

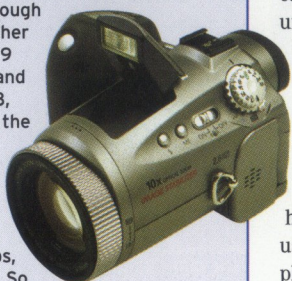
Other irritations include the camera's insistence on automatically opening its TWAIN software and an instance of Microsoft Imaging every time it is plugged into the PC. We couldn't figure out how to set the shutter speed any slower than 8 seconds, so scope for astronomical photography and night storms over the Western Plains is limited.

If you disregard the completely insane price, this camera is in almost every way superior to traditional, film-based cameras with a decent lens. Photos are excellent quality with accurate colour reproduction, they can be uploaded fast, you don't have to fiddle with expensive film and you can take all kinds of... intimate shots without being embarrassed down at the local Kodak Express. PCPP's advice to budding photographers: Step 1, win the lottery. Step 2, buy this camera.

Anthony Fordham

STINGY BASTARDS

So Canon comes along tantalising us with this amazing camera we will never be able to afford, and then when we crack open the packet we find there's only one tiny 16Mb flash card included. Talk about stingy. With a 128Mb flash card, this thing would be damn near unstoppable, but 16Mb? Stand down though soldier, and take another look. 16Mb allows for 9 shots at 1856x1392, and 25 shots at 1024x768, which is approaching the level of normal cameras. And at 640x480, more than detailed enough for web work and emailing holiday snaps, you get space for 54. So it's not THAT bad. Still, even 32Mb would have been twice as nice. Obviously.



PCPP

An excellent digital SLR camera. Deduct 20 points if you don't have \$3000 just lying around

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BOSTON ACOUSTICS

DIGITAL THEATER 6000

DISTRIBUTOR Hi Fi and Video Marketing PRICE \$1399 URL www.bostonacoustics.com

With the SB Live! Platinum and Hercules Gametheater XP jostling for pole position in the soundcard race, it's clearly time we as gamers started to get serious about sound reproduction. PC audio engines are incredibly sophisticated and powerful nowadays, offering everything from 3D positioning to Dolby Digital 5.1 channel surround. Because of this, it's just not good enough to output to a generic \$200 woofer'n'satellites combo. You need - and your soundcard deserves - a powerful, five-channel speaker system. Which is where Boston Acoustics comes in.

The Digital Theater 6000 is such a five-channel system, equipped with a digital processor and enough connectivity to provide for a lot more than just your PC. A meaty subwoofer takes care of the bass, while four 89mm satellite drive units give crisp detail to the screams and cries of a typical Q3A deathmatch. Finally, the centre channel unit, also 89mm, really drives home the five-channel advantage, giving extra depth to 3D positioning.

The wonderful world of sound

Equipped with either of the soundcards mentioned in the first paragraph, the Digital Theater 6000 makes an incredible difference to games. Anything released in the last couple of years that supports EAX or A3D is given a new lease of life with this speaker setup. Thief2 in particular becomes incredibly immersive, and it's easy to determine precisely where prowling guards are in relation to Garret's position. Q3A is simply thunderous, and at times it's almost necessary to stop and take a break from the continued pounding of rockets and shotgun blasts all around you.

Boston doesn't give its speakers a power rating in terms of watts. Rather, it uses decibels, giving the speakers a rating independent of the equipment to which they are attached. The DT6000 is rated to 105 decibels at what Boston calls 'typical listening position', ie at the centre of a raging maelstrom of bone-shattering sound. We asked if this noise level was strictly healthy for the human ear. We were assured by Boston that 105dB is perfectly safe, since sound is not damaging until you get all the way up to 120 dB. Borderline, yes. Loud, definitely.

The DT6000 has six components; four satellites, a subwoofer and a centre channel

housing the digital processor and an LED display showing volume level and selected inputs. At the back of the subwoofer, there are two analog stereo RCA inputs and two digital inputs, one coax and one optical.

In the box, Boston provides all the cabling for speakers and also a coax digital cable to run from your DVD. While coax is more than adequate for a digital connection using home equipment, an optical cable is immune to electro-magnetic fields, and theoretically provides an even cleaner signal.

Because we thought it would be cool, rather than for any signal advantage, we tested the speakers using an optical cable running from a Hercules Gametheater XP (which looks great sitting on top of Boston's subwoofer, by the way). Regardless of signal quality, the optical



cable is a much tidier option than a coax cable, being shorter. However, a 50cm optical cable costs nearly \$40, so optical is really only a sensible option for true audiophiles.

Wear a nappy

Boston recommends placing the subwoofer in a corner of the room for maximum bass response, so this we duly did. The centre channel is best placed atop the monitor or directly in front of the preferred playing position. The front satellites are positioned a little above ear-level at about a metre either side of the monitor. The rear satellites can be mounted on the wall above ear-level, or more conveniently for most gamers,

SYSTEM SPECS

FREQUENCY RESPONSE 50 - 20000Hz
POWER 105dB
PROCESSOR 20-bit Dolby Digital DSP
SUBWOOFER 1x 165mm
CENTRE 1x 89mm
SATELLITES 4x 89mm
INPUTS 1x coax digital, 1x optical digital, 2x RCA analog stereo
OTHER Remote control with volume, source select and speaker trim

placed speaker-up on the floor behind the playing position. Hook the subwoofer to your digital out port using the provided coax cable, switch it on, turn up the volume, ensure your bowel is empty, and start Quake 3.

Oddly enough, the DT6000 doesn't have any controls on the unit itself. Everything is run through a universal remote. Options are provided to switch between a coax digital source, an optical source and two analog RCA sources. This means there's no reason why you shouldn't hook all your equipment to these speakers; TV, DVD, stereo and VCR. The IR sensor is actually on the centre channel unit, so the remote will work just fine even with the subwoofer shoved under the bed.

While Boston has provided all the cables you need to set up, slightly longer cables may be needed for those who want to position the speakers in all corners of the room. It would also have perhaps been better to have the optical in on the centre channel unit, since the length of

most optical cables makes it necessary to keep the subwoofer quite close to your optical source.

But these are just quibbles. Sure, the DT6000 is expensive, with the ability to nearly

double the cost of your system. But if the PC is being used for DVD as well as hardcore gaming, it's more than worth saving up the \$1400. And if the DT6000 isn't enough for you, there is an even more powerful model available. PCPP heartily recommends these speakers for serious gamers, but can take no responsibility for loss of hearing or sphincter-control that use of these speakers may cause.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

Serious speakers for serious gamers. Expensive, but superior performance is more than worth the price-tag

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Hotware Reviews

GRAVIS

ELIMINATOR AFTERSHOCK & GAMEPAD PRO

DISTRIBUTOR ACCO 02 9700 0180 PRICE Blah URL www.gravis.com

■ Snazzy seems to be the only word suitable here.

When they see the new Eliminator Aftershock in your possession, your friends will say one thing: it's snazzy. It's got a whole bunch of snazzy features, like snazzy dual shock analogue sticks and a snazzy 'precision' function that makes control more accurate. It's little brother - the Gamepad Pro - is also snazzy, but to a lesser degree. It's more... spiffy.

Being a joystick cast in the typical PSX Dual Shock mould, the Eliminator and Gamepad Pro simply exude utilitarian comfort. Both are USB based and as such allow for the high responsiveness and quick plug-and-play connectivity inherent in peripherals of this nature. This is complemented by the almost obscene amount of buttons available, with the Eliminator and Gamepad Pro weighing in with ten and eight buttons respectively. That's impressive in anybody's books and allows for a



good level of control customisation. The pads are strengthened further by the addition of analogue controllers - two in the instance of the Eliminator. These can be utilised with the 'precision' function. This function, inherent in Gravis' joypads, allows for a much tighter control of the analogue stick and permits very little discrepancy between the player's movements and what actually happens on screen, which will be a godsend for those who insist on pirating PSX and N64 ROMs for your PC (Which is obviously very naughty - Legal Ed).

Of course, you might say because these pads have obviously been heavily influenced by their PSX cousins, they could be criticised by for being unimaginative. True, but hey, the Eliminator and Gameshock pads are comfortable, reasonably stylish and they work well for gamers looking to elicit a greater level of enjoyment from console-esque games on their PC.

It is obvious that the Gameshock is the better of the two owing to its extra stick and greater number of buttons. However, it's not a necessary purchase for those who don't want to play precision racing games or PSX ports. The Gamepad Pro will suffice for any other gaming purpose you care to pursue. Though, if you've got the cash, then why not go for top of the line?

Daniel Staines

PCPP

Very good and very comfortable pads, well constructed and functional. USB connectivity make setup a breeze

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THRUSTMASTER

FORMULA PRO DIGITAL RACING WHEEL

DISTRIBUTOR Thrustmaster 02 8303 1818 PRICE \$149 URL www.thrustmaster.com

■ We love racing wheels. Except for the now difficult to find flight yoke, the wheel is most over-the-top outrageous gaming accessory good money can buy. With a big monitor, five-channel surround sound and a beefy graphics card, the racing wheel makes any driving game complete. Thrustmaster's Formula Pro Digital is an adequate addition to any complete - and do we mean complete - gaming set up.

Thrustmaster was quick to point out that the higher price of this unit over the Modena model was due to the all-steel construction of the wheel and the gearstick.



This is certainly evident in the sheer weight of the unit; don't drop it on your foot. With a central clamping system and quick-release handles, the wheel is easy to attach to a desk and pack away again after a hard night's burning rubber.

The Modena wheel - also from Thrustmaster - featured an eight-way hat on the wheel, which while probably unnecessary for most driving games, certainly added a little extra functionality. The Formula Pro Digital has only four buttons on the wheel, along with two gear-change paddles and a separate gear stick with only two degrees of movement; up and down. On the floor there are accelerator and clutch pedals, as expected.

So, an unremarkable wheel but a solid one. We gave it a run through NFS Porsche 2000, Colin McRae Rally 2.0 and 1nsane and it performed quite well. Control was precise enough to get around the corners, although when jostling for first place with the associated FPS drop, the wheel did feel a touch sluggish.

This wheel is big and quite ugly, and the Logitech Formula Force GP is a smaller and more ergonomic unit, but at \$250 it should be. And the Thrustmaster Formula Pro (we know, the names are incredibly confusing) isn't force feedback, although the wheel does have an "elastomeric" spring for "realistic turning feel".

If you want your gaming beast to impress the opposite sex, you need a racing wheel, it's as simple as that. And for a buck less than \$150, the Thrustmaster Formula Pro Digital is a very good buy. So hit the road.

Anthony Fordham

PCPP

Does the job, albeit without force-feedback. Low price gets you on the road, all-steel construction keeps you there!

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GRAVIS

ELIMINATOR PRECISION PRO JOYSTICK

DISTRIBUTOR ACCO 02. 9700 0180 **PRICE** \$89.95 **URL** www.gravis.com

The Gravis Eliminator Precision Pro resembles a massive, gnarled schlinger. It's the sort of phallic, ribbed device that will terrify the clergy and immediately appeal to students at private schools.

But seriously, for a non-Force Feedback controller, the unit is surprisingly large. On the flipside, the weighty stand provides excellent stability for the unit, eliminating the need for sucker pads or retention clamps. The stick itself is a highly functional, ambidextrous design, perfect for those of us with large hands. Seven buttons are mounted within easy reach, as well as the obligatory throttle and hat-switch. There is the now-standard twisting handle, which adds another axis for rudder and rotational control. Newcomers to this feature will find



lateral control an essential asset in both Mech and Flight Simulations. And, when rudder control is not needed or desired, users can apply the Twist lock, which removes unwanted rotary roll.

Gravis has also implemented the all-new Weapon Scroll feature. Weapon Scroll is a rotary wheel mounted below the POV hat-switch, which allows you to scroll through weapons quickly. It makes selecting a new weapon much easier than repeatedly

pressing the 'next weapon' button. The Precision button, peculiar to this device, is mounted on the joystick base. When activated, the

Precision button automatically decreases the sensitivity of the stick - basically, larger

movements translate to smaller movements in game. For flight sims, this is very useful where absolute control

and accuracy is essential. Carrier landings spring to mind, where violent movements can be fatal.

Users can plug the Precision Pro into either a gameport or USB jack. Installation is simple - after installing the basic software and drivers, Windows automatically recognises the device and installs the necessary drivers. The included Gravis Xperience software is a powerful application for defining custom controls for the joystick. Gravis has also included a number of predefined Gamesets (read profiles), for the more popular games. If you're not keen to get your hands dirty, updated profiles can be downloaded directly from the Gravis site.

Ultimately, the Eliminator is a robust solution at an attractive price. If you can ignore the absence of aesthetics and force feedback, it makes a worthy joystick and weapon of mass destruction. The 3-year warranty is an excellent addition.

Hugh Norton-Smith

PCPP

Impeccably constructed, well priced and fully featured. Lack of force-feedback keeps the price down

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MICROSOFT

SIDEWINDER FORCE FEEDBACK 2

DISTRIBUTOR Microsoft 132 058 **PRICE** \$199 **URL** www.microsoft.com/sidewinder

Not content with dominating the computer software industry, Microsoft is rapidly diversifying its product lines. For some time now, Microsoft has produced the best computer mice in the world, but the XBOX, the Microsoft Network and the Sidewinder controllers signal the company's expansion into non-traditional areas.

Microsoft entered the PC controller market a few years back with the Sidewinder line; the original Force Feedback joystick was a huge success, pioneering tactile response technology. At the time of its release, there were scant titles that made use of force feedback. This has changed, with the majority of recent games supporting Force Feedback via DirectInput.



The Force Feedback 2 is Microsoft's flagship joystick, and offers numerous advantages over its predecessor: it's much lighter, sports a built-in power supply, has far more realistic force effects and has had a thorough design overhaul. The design team has also added an embedded 16-bit 25Mhz processor. This helps reduce the burden on your CPU, calculating all the requisite force feedback effects internally.

At the base of the stick is a small photo-receptor, which can tell if you're holding the stick - as soon as you place your clammy mitts on the Sidewinder, it springs to life. The

Force Feedback 2 is well styled, durable and ergonomic, making it perfect

for entertaining private school students. Although it consumes a large chunk of real estate, the weighty base is perfect where movement is sharp and violent.

The Force Feedback 2 is based around the successful Precision 2 design (see PCPP#54), with the addition of a powerful force feedback motor. The force feedback engine is suitable for all genres - it is equally impressive in Mechwarrior 4, Crimson Skies and B17: The Mighty Eighth. Microsoft claims gamers can feel as many as 100 different forces, ranging from subtle sensations to massive jolts. The forces can also be multilayered, allowing multiple force to hit you simultaneously.

For the first time, force feedback seems to have been implemented as more than a gimmick - it's not a sales-con, but a genuinely useful addition to the full, immersive experience.

Hugh Norton-Smith

PCPP

The ultimate Force Feedback joystick. Superior build quality and performance. Sidewinder wins again!

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THE BEAST

THE ULTIMATE RIG

The Beast is the product of years of painstaking research: We have coalesced all the relevant computer knowledge and slashed through all the misinformation and hype to provide you with the definitive high-speed PC. Below are a series of eminently useful recommendations for those of you ready to spend your hard-earned cash on top-notch gear. Bow down, churl.

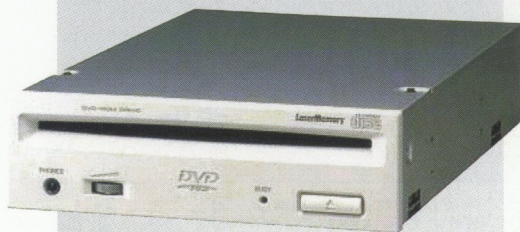
Pioneer 16xDVD ROM & H'ware Decoder

DISTRIBUTOR Pioneer

PRICE \$549

URL www.pioneeraus.com.au

Pioneer's excellent drive will take care of all your DVD movie needs. Whether it's the calm introspection of Kriztoff Kieslowski's *Three Colours: White* or the non-stop gore-fest of Peter Jackson's *Braindead*, your viewing pleasure will remain uninterrupted by glitch, skip or irritating load-time. You also get a tasty Videologic hardware decoder for the smoothest possible shave... er... movie, and a bunch of Video Ezy vouchers.



Yamaha CRW2100E-VK

DISTRIBUTOR Yamaha 1800 682 705

PRICE \$599

URL www.yamaha.co.jp/english



Yamaha not only manufactures some of the world's fastest motorbikes, but can now lay claim to the fastest CD burner on the market. The CRW2100E writes at 16x, rewrites at 10x and reads at 40x. It's also a formidable Digital Audio Extraction drive, making it perfect for Mp3 buffs. The included Adaptec software package really rounds out the package. No proper system should be without a CD burner.

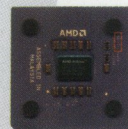
AMD Athlon 1.3 GHz

DISTRIBUTOR AMD Australia

PRICE \$649

URL www.amd.com

This blazing processor has the most advanced floating point unit in the world, 256k of integrated full speed L2 cache and a 200Mhz EV6 Front Side Bus. Which equals FAST. Never wait for Outlook to load again, ever. Do six things at once. Go mad, play Giants on the highest detail setting at 1600 x 1200. This thing is so powerful it's bad for you, guaranteed.



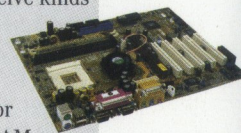
ASUS A7M266

DISTRIBUTOR Achieva 02 9742 3288

PRICE \$415

URL www.asus.com.tw

The first Athlon motherboard supporting Double Data Rate DRAM, the A7M kicked twelve kinds of Bass Avenger out of our KT133 ATV board here at PCPP. As with all ASUS components, the A7M comes loaded with extras; an AGP Pro slot for professional graphics cards, 4 DDR RAM expansion slots for memory, ATA/100 support and a host of overclocking features.



Hercules Gametheater XP

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 8303 1818

PRICE \$299

URL www.hercules.com



At last the SB Live! has been toppled. The Gametheater sounds just as good, looks ten times better, and has a fat PCI cable to make the Beast look really serious.

The rack also has four USB ports, making it a great multi-purpose hub for joysticks, digital cameras, webcams, racing wheels... hell, anything you could possibly think of. Stylish and functional. What ever will they come up with next?

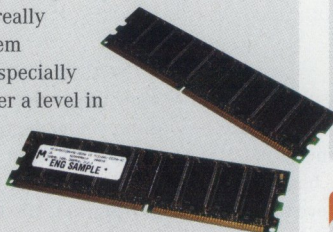
256Mb DDR DRAM

DISTRIBUTOR Kingmax 02 9648 4658

PRICE \$799

URL www.kingmax.com

Once you go to 256Mb you'll never look back. You'll wonder how you ever survived with a miserable eighth of a gigabyte. This RAM is phenomenally expensive, but runs at a Double Data Rate, a blistering 266MHz. This really pumps up system performance, especially while you render a level in Q3Radiant and kick Thresh's buttocks in Quake3 at the same time.



Microsoft Intellimouse Optical

DISTRIBUTOR Microsoft 132058

PRICE \$89

URL www.microsoft.com.au



While the big silver Intellimouse Explorer certainly looks nice, we find the key word here is big. It's too big. But this little fellow is just right. An optical sensor means you'll never have to scrape that revolting black gunk off the inside ever again, and a USB connection means your lightning reflexes will now be fairly reflected in your next game of Tribes 2.

Boston Acoustics Digital Theater 6000

DISTRIBUTOR Hi Fi & Video Marketing 02 9319 6877

PRICE \$1399

URL www.bostonacoustics.com

WARNING: ensure bowel is empty before using this speaker setup. The DT6000 is so powerful it contravenes several building ordinances, and violates no less than four separate paragraphs in the Geneva Convention. Five channel surround, funky remote and optical in make this THE choice for people who can't take the pain from its oughta-be-illegal bigger brother, the DT7000.



Seagate Cheetah X15 18Gb

DISTRIBUTOR Agate Technology 02 9870 3600

PRICE \$1191

URL www.seagate.com

It's not huge, but it's the fastest hard disk on the block, consistently pulverising the competition into small, vaguely circular lumps. The X15 runs at a stupidly fast 15,000rpm and has 4Mb of cache. It's only 18Gb, but two or even three of these would allow you to save every thirty seconds in Deus Ex. Amazing.



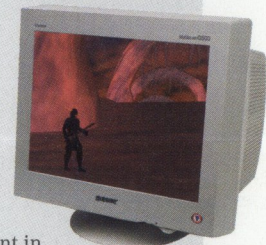
Sony G500 21" FD Trinitron Monitor

DISTRIBUTOR Beyond Computers 1300 1300 29

PRICE \$2050

URL www.by.com.au

Big is beautiful. Never a truer word was spoke. Sure, you will have to completely redesign your study or gaming room to fit this monster in, but once it's in, you'll wonder how you ever did without it. Magnificent in every way, capable of a staggering 2048 x 1536, crystal clear, anti-reflective and thoroughly good for your soul.



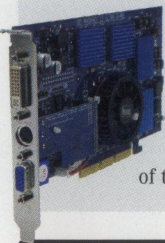
Hercules 3D Prophet II Ultra

DISTRIBUTOR Guillemot 02 8303 1818

PRICE \$999

URL www.hercules.com

As the PCPP PowerTest attests, the 3D Prophet II Ultra is the fastest card on the market. Priced competitively for an Ultra, it comes with digital and tv-out as well as standard VGA. Excellent overclocking ability, exceptional build quality and funkiest, spunkiest electric blue PCB make this card pick of the bunch.



Logitech Cordless Freedom Navigator

DISTRIBUTOR Logitech 02 9972 3711

PRICE \$219

URL www.logitech.com

Unchain your heart! Or at least unchain your keyboard. With all the kit the Beast includes, you'll end up with a huge ugly snarl of cables behind your desk. The Cordless Freedom Navigator eliminates at least one potential deathtrap (use your imagination) and the soft-as-silk keys make typing a 40,000 word thesis on Post-Structuralist Feminism an absolute breeze. First class honours every time! Also good for Quake3.



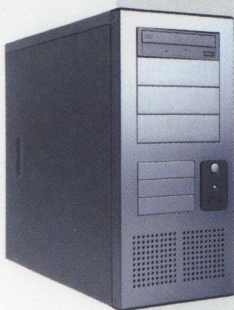
LianLi PC-60

DISTRIBUTOR Aust. PC Accessories 03 9763 8200

PRICE \$400

URL www.apca.net.au

A stunner. All aluminium and built to withstand a direct nuclear strike in the megaton range. As we have mentioned more than once, we even dropped this case down a flight of concrete steps and it barely flinched. Ten bays keep everything snug, three extra fans keep it cool, and slide-off covers and a motherboard tray mean it's ready for upgrade action any time.



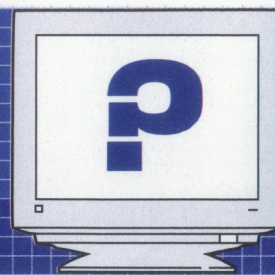
TOTAL BEAST VALUE

\$9599

SETUP

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

DANIEL RUTTER WAXES TECHNICAL



WRITE TO

SETUP

PC PowerPlay
PO Box 634
Strawberry Hills
NSW 2016
setup@pcpowerplay.com.au

When you write remember to include as much pertinent information as possible. Send your CONFIG.SYS and AUTOEXEC.BAT and any associated *.INI files for Windows that might tell me more about your problem. Give me as detailed an explanation as you can and be sure to include as much detail as possible about your PC.

Feel free to email your questions or, if you want to snail mail, please remember to write clearly or better still print your letters. Please note that due to the volume of messages we receive, we cannot guarantee a response to all of your queries.

SERVER SETUP

Q I've got myself a really good clan that plays Counter-Strike and other good FPS games. I've gotten a Web site, message board and mailing list, but I'd really love to get a server so we could have our clan matches, practices and just a basic public server for most of the time.

I'm writing to ask what a good system would be for a server running Counter-Strike, that isn't too expensive.

Also, what would be a suitable connection for running a server? Would a cable connection be ok? Could I use a cable connection with my own PC, and share it with the server? Would it make the server really slow?

[EHG]Demon

A Just about any old Windows or, for better stability, Linux box will do for a dedicated server - which is a server which doesn't have a local, zero-ping client, but only exists for other computers running the client software to connect to. If you run a server on your machine, and play the game as well, you are running a "listen server". And, if other players have considerably higher ping than you, you have also got a considerable advantage in twitch games.

Dedicated servers don't have to do any of the graphical stuff, just track where everyone is and where they're going and who's blown the head off of whom, and that's not nearly as challenging as running a client.

A 400MHz P-II or Celeron is quite fast enough to run a single 20 player CS dedicated server.

A cable connection is technically capable of providing a game server like this with more than enough bandwidth, as long as there aren't too many other people on the cable segment sucking up the shared bandwidth. But Australian cable connections are capped too tightly for this to be possible, and the Acceptable Use Policies forbid it anyway - both Aussie cable networks forbid "unlimited" accounts from running any servers at all, including game ones.

Neither Australian all-you-can-eat cable connection option (Telstra or Optus) gives you enough upstream bandwidth (data going from you to the Internet) for a server to work well with more than a few players. It's 128 kilobits per second all the way, which is 16 kilobytes per second. That can be saturated by four or five players on modems, let alone other broadband users.

The server admin can choke back people's data transfer rate, but choke it back below modem bandwidth and you get worse-than-modem gameplay. Wow.

There are other bandwidth and behaviour limits as well for cable accounts - monthly bandwidth caps for Telstra, rolling biweekly adaptive bandwidth caps for Optus (a rather odd rule that's not yet been properly tested - your allowable bandwidth depends on other people's behaviour, and you can't tell exactly what the limit IS at any given moment!).

Nobody's going to bust yo' ass if you just run a server for a few people to muck about on now and then, and password protecting it can keep people you don't even know from eating your bandwidth. But the upstream cap's still there.

You need a proper, unlimited, medium-fat pipe to run a server. In Australia, this is still not cheap, and probably won't be for some time, which is why local servers tend to be located at ISPs or universities.

On the plus side, you certainly could keep using your PC while a dedicated server ran in the background, provided the PC was fast enough to do both things at once.

There's more basic server config info at <http://server.counter-strike.net/howto.html>.

VIDEO CARD SWITCHEROO

Q I have recently ordered a computer, and on the original quote the video card was a 32Mb TNT2 M64 AGP, but they said that a 16Mb Matrox G400 is much better than the M64 and they put that in.

What is the difference? I thought the 32Mb one would be much better, am I getting ripped off, or do they have a point?

Ben Ross

A The G400 is faster than a TNT2 M64, but not tremendously faster. With less memory, given that many modern games can definitely use 32Mb of graphics card memory, the 16Mb G400 can be a lot slower unless you drop your texture quality enough that you can get along with just 16Mb.

So it's not a rip-off, exactly, but I wouldn't be surprised if the only reason you got the G400 was because they'd run out of M64s. The G400 is actually a more expensive card - as I write this, it's maybe \$250 even for the 16Mb G400, against \$200 or so for the 32Mb M64.

That said, if you buy a computer and the spec sheet says you've got something other than what was actually delivered, you obviously have a crystal clear consumer protection case against the dealer, should you want to make them actually give you what they promised.

GPU GRUNT

Q Hail mighty great wisdomed tech guy [I'm hearin' the grovel, but I ain't seein' no bribe... -Ed], I got into a huge argument with my friend about what exactly the GPU does on the GeForce. He said that the GPU takes ALL the load off the CPU so the CPU is left to do just the sound and the AI, but from what I read some where, the CPU still have to render the polygons and the wireframes. Can you tell me how exactly does the graphic card work together with the CPU and the RAM?

Wei Ren

A Your friend is wrong. Nvidia's marketing may give the impression that the "Graphics Processing Unit" on GeForce-series cards really handles the whole 3D enchilada, but all it does that earlier 3D chips don't is handle the transform and lighting portions of the rendering path. In English, that's how the player's-eye view of the world is laid out, and how objects in the world are illuminated. The CPU still has to handle the geometry work - figuring out where things are.

Nvidia didn't invent the GPU; the main chip on any 3D accelerated video card could be called the same thing.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS...

AN INCREDIBLE SIDEWINDER GAMEVOICE ONLINE COMMUNICATION PERIPHERAL, COURTESY OF THE NICE PEOPLE AT MICROSOFT. HURRAH FOR THAT!

MEGAHERTZ, SCHMEGAHERTZ

Q When can a person buy the P4 2GHz? Is AMD planning to compete with it? Pretty fast... at the beginning of the year 1GHz was the fastest, then at the end 2GHz. Wow.

Mohamed Moussa

A Comparing processors based purely on their speed in megahertz is like comparing cars based on their engine RPM redline. Sure, all other things being equal, you'll be going faster when your engine's turning at 7,000RPM than when it's turning at 5,000RPM. But all other things are certainly *not* equal when you're comparing the P4 with, say, an Athlon. Blindly assuming that a 2GHz P4 (a chip which, as I write this, seems likely to be on the market around the middle of the year) will be faster for our beloved games than a 1.5GHz Athlon (which should also be out by then) isn't wise.

The 1.4GHz and 1.5GHz P4s that are on the market as I write this do not fare well against Athlons and Pentium IIIs, in bang per buck or absolute terms. They give you considerably less speed per dollar, and often less speed, full stop, depending on what you're doing.

The first of a new generation of processors is usually an ordinary performer compared with the last of the old generation. That's partly because there's lots of software optimised to run fast on the old chips, and partly because new CPU types often have, as their major new feature, the ability to be made to run at much higher clock speeds. Eventually.

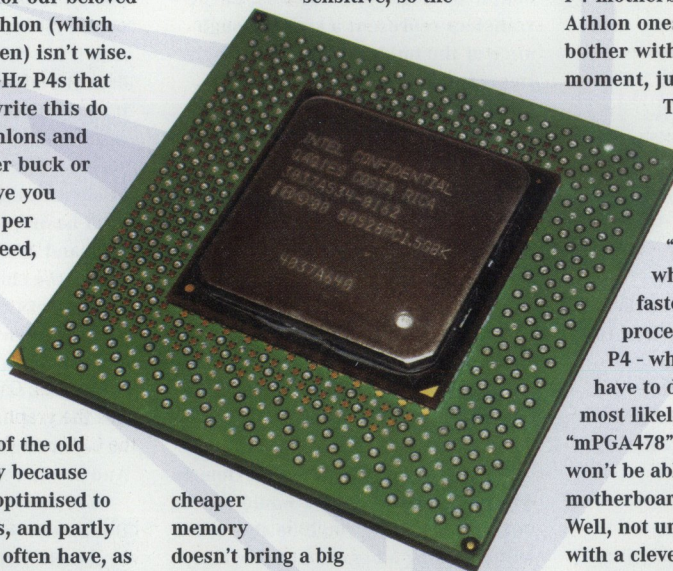
But the early model CPUs of a new type DON'T run at those much higher clock speeds. They often don't run at much higher clock speeds than their predecessors.

The P4's unusual in this respect - the 1.5GHz version is 50% faster clocked than the fastest P-III, and 25% faster clocked than the fastest Athlon. But it makes up for this with an unusually crummy clock-for-clock

speed; if they were to run at the SAME clock speed, a P4 would quite dramatically lose to a P-III or Athlon, for almost any task.

There are two big problems with the P4 as it stands right now. One, it's tied to Rambus memory - you have to buy Rambus RIMM memory modules with your P4, because no motherboards are available that support any other kind. Boards that support the new DDR SDRAM will be along fairly shortly, I'm told.

Rambus memory is quite fast - though its poor latency compared with SDRAM makes it not as quick for many tasks as the raw bandwidth benchmarks suggest - but it's much more expensive than the plain non-DDR SDRAM that pretty much everyone's still running. And desktop tasks aren't actually very RAM-speed sensitive, so the



cheaper memory doesn't bring a big performance loss with it, even for games.

Buy a mere 1.4GHz P4 and 128Mb of memory to go with it, and you're looking at \$2000, as I write this. If you want more than 128Mb RAM... well, let's hope you don't, mm'okay?

With nothing much optimised to work with the P4 yet, this chip will perform somewhat worse, for desktop tasks including games, than a 1.2GHz Athlon backed by plain vanilla SDRAM, yours for \$1350. Never mind the new DDR Athlon boards.



Actually, the 1.4GHz P4 probably won't do much better than a mere 1GHz Athlon, which with 128Mb of RAM is currently only around \$900. Take into account the fact that the P4 motherboards cost more than the Athlon ones as well, and it's nutty to bother with the new Intel chip at the moment, just on these grounds.

The second big problem with the early P4s is that they use a form factor which will shortly be abandoned. They're "Socket 423" chips, but when Intel rolls out the faster, smaller manufacturing process evolved version of the P4 - which they apparently may have to do just to get to 2GHz - it'll most likely come in the incompatible "mPGA478" form factor. And you won't be able to upgrade old motherboards with the new chips. Well, not unless someone comes up with a clever adapter, but there's been no word about that yet.

New CPUs are often crummy value for money. The 60MHz Pentium didn't compare well with the fastest 486 chips, the 233MHz P-II wasn't exciting compared with the 233MHz Pentium MMX, and the 450MHz P-III had nothing much going for it compared with the 450MHz P-II.

But none of those chips made you spend big bucks on special memory. And it's that, plus the lousy upgrade path, that's likely to make early adopters of the P4 feel a bit goofy in a year.

TECH TIP

GREASE ME OOP, LASSIE!

Every now and then I get a letter from someone asking something to do with thermal transfer compound. Which is better known as "heat sink grease", or by the vernacular "Eeeew!".

Thermal transfer compound is the less convenient but more effective cousin of the thermal pad - the stick-on thing on the bottom of many processor, and other, heat sinks. You have to have some sort of transfer medium between the heat sink and the chip, or lots of tiny air spaces between the two greatly reduces the amount of heat transferred.

Thermal pads are simple, but they don't work very well. They can't get completely out of the way in the areas of the contact patch where there would otherwise be direct metal-to-metal contact. Thermal grease, though, CAN squish out of the way.

There are some hybrid materials out there now, which come pre-applied to heat sinks and have the approximate consistency of chewing gum. They're generally better than a pad, but not as good as grease.

Some people scrape off the standard pad from a heatsink on their CPU, graphics card chip or whatever, but don't put grease in its place. Good one, Einstein. Why, if you've done this, did you think the pad was there in the first place? D'you reckon the cooler maker thought "Gee, this thing just works too darn WELL - I know, let's stick an insulating pad on the bottom of it!"?

Removing the pad is good, if you want to overclock chips without overheating them. But you have to apply grease where the pad was. It's simple enough to do; you just want a THIN layer of grease all over the chip. Apply the grease - doing it with your finger is fine - and then press the heat sink into place, and lift it off again. If there are any dry spots in the rectangular patch of grease you've just stamped onto the heat sink, put a bit more grease on them, until you get even coverage from the minimum possible amount of the stuff.

You're not trying to lubricate the contact patch; if you wiggle the heat sink around, you should still feel some friction.

Working with thermal grease is pretty simple. It's goopy and nasty looking, but it doesn't smell of anything and isn't particularly toxic. It behaves pretty much like zinc cream, overall. If you don't eat it or rub it in your eyes, you should be fine, and even a small tube will last for many applications - if you get it wrong, wipe the chip and heatsink clean and try again.

Any decent computer store should be able to sell you a little tube of the stuff; electronics shops have it too, but might not have the more exotic kinds that work a little better and cost a lot more.



Thermal transfer goop comes in everything from snazzy syringes to basic plastic bags

It is just a matter of how MUCH load it can take off the CPU, and how fast it does its thing. At the moment, the GeForce2 is pretty much where it's at, but you still need some decent CPU muscle to keep the 3D frame rates up.

DRIVE DECISION

Q I am looking to buy a new computer and was wondering: which is faster for an IDE Hard Drive, ATA-66 or ATA-100?

M. Jones

A There is very little difference. Current IDE hard drives support different flavours of Ultra ATA, also referred to as Ultra DMA, or just DMA or ATA with a number after it. That number indicates the theoretical maximum bandwidth of the hard drive interface - 33, 66 or 100 megabytes per second. The interface can't actually transfer data that quickly, but never mind that. Handwave. Mumble.

The major problem with all this is that hard drives, even very fast hard drives, don't have high enough sustained transfer rates that they can "saturate" - fully use - the bandwidth of the faster Ultra ATA modes.

Most modern motherboards have two IDE channels, each of which probably supports at least Ultra ATA/33, and each of which therefore has 33 megabyte per second theoretical bandwidth. On each channel, though, you can only put two devices - one master, one slave. So the most ways the available bandwidth can possibly be split is two.

And while IDE hard drives with real better-than-15Mb-per-second sustained transfer rates ARE now available - heck, they're quite common, these days - drives that manage better than 33 megabytes per second (to saturate ATA/66 in a pair, or saturate ATA/33 with only one drive on a channel) or 50 megabytes per second (to saturate ATA/100 in a pair) are still pretty darn rare.

All drives can, mind you, use all of the bandwidth that's available to them, when the data they are moving is going to or from their on-board RAM cache. The cache for a consumer drive, though, is only likely to be a couple of megabytes - or less. Cache transfers represent a small enough slice of the total data flow that their impact on overall transfer rate is measurable, but imperceptible for desktop computer purposes.

On the plus side, it's not as if the fancier interfaces add anything much to the price of drives or motherboards. And everything's backward compatible. Plug an ATA/100 drive into an ATA/33 motherboard, say, and it'll run at the slower speed. And ATA/100 controllers are fine with ATA/33 drives, and even with older drives that don't support any of the "Ultra" modes.

In answer to your question, though - ATA/100 is faster, as you would expect, but there's no way you'll be able to tell without using a benchmark program.

OVERCLOCK EVERYTHING! EVERYTHING, I SAY!

Q I was wondering if I could possibly overclock my modem. I read your review of the MS Sidewinder Game Voice, and it said "And, much to the delight of Sebastian, who uses an overclocked 300 baud modem...". So the question is, can it be done? Because after moving to my new ISP my downloads start at 25Kb per second, then move down in around 20-30 seconds to a steady 4.5K, going through 18.8Kb/12Kb/6Kb and so on. I

get 10% of say a 3 meg file in 20 seconds, so the speed is there, but it doesn't stay. So do you possibly think there would be a way to unleash the speed on a normal 56K modem?

Rick Malone

A Sorry, but your modem's already as unleashed as it's ever going to get. 4.5 kilobytes per second is about as fast as you can expect from a "56K" modem, unless you're transferring very compressible data; overhead in the transfer process, plus the fact that you never actually connect at the advertised 56,000 bytes per second download speed, mean about 5Kb/s is the limit.

So why do you see those weird download speeds? Because your browser, most likely Internet Explorer, is lying to you.

What IE does when you start a download, is it immediately starts sucking down data for the file, even before you've told it where you want the file saved. It starts the transfer right away and just buffers the data until you give it a file to put it in.

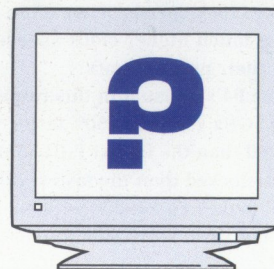
This is a good idea - it gives you a few more seconds of download time, and gets the download over with sooner.

But IE calculates its download speed poorly. It only starts counting when you've told it where to save the file. And if it's collected, say, 25 kilobytes of data already when it starts the clock (as it were), then when it gets to the one second mark and shows you a download speed, it'll think it's collected, say, 28 kilobytes in that one second.

It hasn't, of course. It's collected 3Kb, and 25Kb was already waiting before the clock started. But IE will nonetheless report 28Kb per second.

At the ten second mark, assuming a constant 3Kb per second download rate, IE's got 55Kb - 10 times 3Kb, plus the 25Kb it had to start with. So it will be reporting a 5.5Kb/s download rate. And so on.

You can't overclock a modem. Well, OK, maybe you could change a crystal or something, and marginally improve compression performance on an older model. But if you're not nitpicking, it can't be done, and there'd be no reason to do it even if you could.



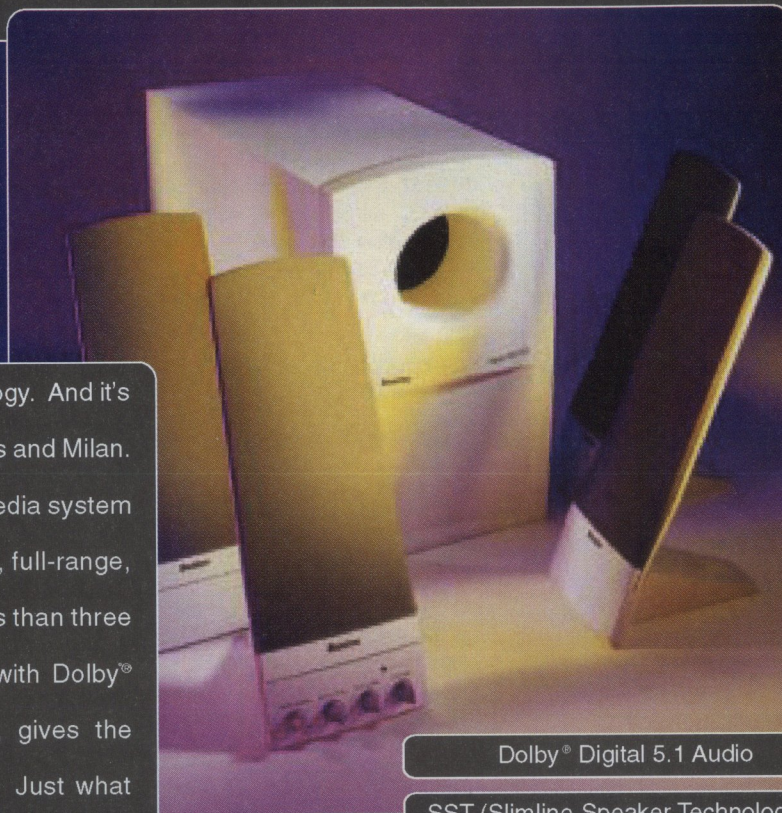
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Boston

CD POWERPLAY #59



STARTING CD POWERPLAY

Welcome to the latest CD PowerPlay. This month's double CD contains another tantalising glimpse of the next - and eagerly awaited - game from Blizzard. Warcraft III just looks better every time we see it. We're sure you'll agree after checking out the gameplay footage for yourself!

Things are a bit quiet on the demo front, unfortunately, as everyone gears up for E3 in May. But there's still Gunman Chronicles, Fate of the Dragon, the excellent Battle of Britain, and the cool Serious Sam!

cdtech@powerplay.next.com.au

Faulty CDs will be replaced free of charge. Send it (no postage required), together with a description of the error, to:

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Reply Paid 634, 78 Renwick St

Redfern NSW 2016

DEMOS CD1

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Take to the sky in five flyable aircraft for the RAF or Luftwaffe as either a pilot or commander and battle over eight hundred miles of virtual airspace. Battle of Britain brings awesome realism and requires skill and courage in your quest to topple your enemy.

DAVID MIRRA FREESTYLE BMX

There are no shaved legs and skinny tyres in this kind of biking. David Mirra Freestyle BMX is about busting big air tricks and landing them hard with the slap of your wheels. It's basically all about pushing yourself to the edge and savouring the rush when you finally nail that new freestyle move.

SPOTLIGHT CD1

WARCRAFT III

In the face of an even greater invasion from the Burning Legion, the reunited Orcish Horde and the Human armies of Azeroth have shifted their focus from conquest, and betrayal to basic survival. Catch a glimpse of the chaos to come in these cinematic teasers and gameplay previews for Warcraft III.



GUNMAN CHRONICLES

Gunman Chronicles combines a wild-west sensibility with high-tech styling to create a thrilling and visually unique firstperson action experience - powered by the Half-Life engine!

TYPING OF THE DEAD

Run through House of the Dead 2, but instead of firing a light-gun you type a word that is displayed onscreen in front of the creature attacking you. The faster and more accurately you type the words, the faster you'll kill the zombies and the higher your score will be.

strategy game, Entrepreneur. Players must start up a company and then try to take over the world by becoming a monopoly in their chosen industry.

FATE OF THE DRAGON

In the confusion following the collapse of the Eastern Han Dynasty, rival warlords have set up their own kingdoms, splitting China into three parts. Can you create a mighty army in an attempt to control the Three Kingdoms and reunify China?

SHEEP

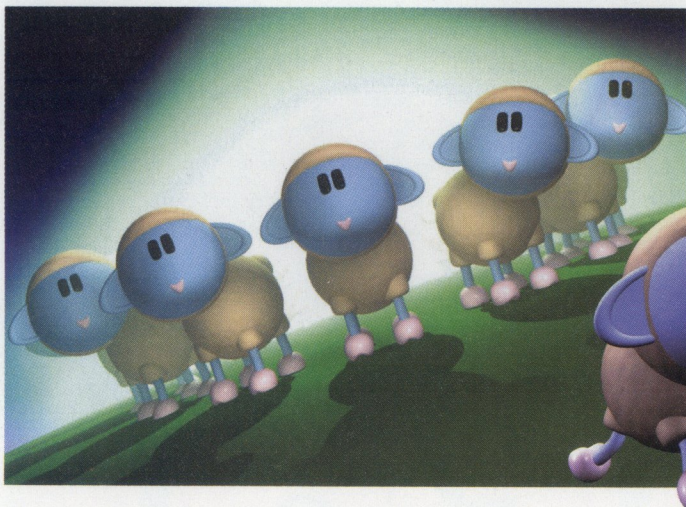
They've travelled vast distances through space. They've colonised countless star systems. They've forgotten why they're here... Can you guide the lovable, but soooo stupid, Sheep to Mt Mouflon without getting them bashed, boiled, blown up or blow-dried?

HEIST

You play a lone criminal bailed from jail, called upon to assemble a team of crack heisters for an unknown gangland mastermind. Working for your unseen boss, you travel across the United States, carrying out jobs to the specification of the cartel's sinister leader.

THE CORPORATE MACHINE

The Corporate Machine is Stardock's sequel the award-winning business



DEMOS CD 1 CONTROLS



DEMOS CD1 CONTROLS

BATTLE OF BRITAIN

Basic Key Guide

Cursor Left - Aileron Left
 Cursor Right - Aileron Right
 Cursor Up - Elevator Forward
 Cursor Down - Elevator Back
 O - Full 100% Throttle
 G - Raise or Lower Landing Gear
 H - Heads Up Instruments Display
 F - Flaps Toggle
 < - Left Wheel Brake
 > - Right Wheel Brake
 R - Radio Messages Menu
 I - Info Panel Toggle
 O - Open Cockpit
 CTRL & E - Eject or Bailout
 CTRL & G - Emergency Release
 P - Pause GameM - Map Screen
 Tab - Accelerated Time Toggle
 [- Previous Weapon
] - Next Weapon
 N - Cycle Through Weapons
 BackSpace - Inside/Outside View Toggle
 O - Open Cockpit/Eject cockpit
 Q - Lean Left
 W - Lean Right
 Numeric Keypad 8 - Forward Gunner

Numeric Keypad 5 - Top Gunner
 Numeric Keypad 2 - Rear Gunner
 F1-F12 - View

DAVID MIRRA FREESTYLE BMX

Ground Moves

D - Bunnyhop
 (press, hold and release at edge of jump)
 E - Grind + Direction on pad
 Up Arrow - Speed up when coasting
 (tap or hold for extra speed)

Air Moves

S Key - Big Air Trick + Direction
 F Key - Modifier Trick + Direction
 A Key - When in the air - A +
 Direction (Fastplant, Wall Tap,
 Wallrides etc)
 W - Spin Left
 R - Spin Right

GUNMAN CHRONICLES

Move Forward - W
 Move Back - S
 Strafe Left - A
 Strafe Right - D

TECH CD1

ULEAD VIDEOSTUDIO 5.0

Movie making for everyone. Easily transform video from camcorders or any capture device into exciting movies. Includes over 30 different video filter effects and special effects.

MUSIC MATCH JUKEBOX 6.0

MusicMatch Jukebox is integrated, digital music-management software that combines a CD ripper, MP3 encoder, playlist maker, ID3 tag editor, and media player.

SCOUR EXCHANGE

Scour Exchange (SX) allows users to search for, download, and share digital entertainment files, including MP3s, video, images, photographs, and more.

NETVIEW SCANNER SUITE

Scan your Web site and network for security vulnerabilities, revealing wrongly shared resources, unprotected ports, and weak passwords.

Jump - Space
 Duck - Ctrl
 Swim Up - V
 Swim Down - C
 Walk - Shift
 Weapons - 1 through 0
 Next Weapon - mousewheel up
 Prev Weapon - mousewheel down
 Last Used Weapon - Q
 Primary Attack - mouse button 1
 Secondary Attack - mouse button 2
 Use Item - E
 Flashlight - F
 Spray Logo - T
 Chat - Y

TYPING OF THE DEAD

Use that keyboard and start typing furiously!

SHEEP

Keyboard Control

Move - Arrow Keys
 Run - Left Shift
 Creep/Activate - Left Alt
 Shout/Drop Sweets - Space
 Map - Tab

Mouse Control

Run - Left button
 Creep/Activate - Right button
 Shout/Drop Sweets - Space
 Map - Tab

Other Keys

Pause - Esc
 Mouse control - M
 Keyboard control - K
 Joystick control - J

THE CORPORATE MACHINE

Mouse to click
 Keyboard to input data

FATE OF THE DRAGON

Mouse to control

HEIST

Mouse and arrow keys



GAMEPLAY CD1

UNREAL TOURNAMENT BONUS PACK #4

An early Christmas gift from Epic comes in the form of yet another Unreal Tournament Bonus Pack! This one features ten new maps and two new models.

QUAKE 3 ARENA TOOLS SOURCE CODE

This contains the source code for the Quake III Arena and Quake III: Team

Arena tools. It contains source code for Radiant, Q3Map, Q3Data, Q3Asm and related support files. It does NOT contain prebuilt executables or end user friendly gizmos.

RED ALERT 2 MAP PACK

This is a great pack of three new multiplayer experiences. The pack consists of Kalifornia, Breakaway, and Hail Mary. Well worth playing if you've saved the world enough times already.



DELTA FORCE LAND WARRIOR UPDATE V1.01

This update for Delta Force: Land Warrior includes fixes in the NovaWorld multiplayer connection and solves a problem with singleplayer saved games.



OTHER PATCHES INCLUDE

Kingdom Under Fire
 Quake III: Arena Tweak
 Sacrifice
 Star Trek: Starfleet Command 2

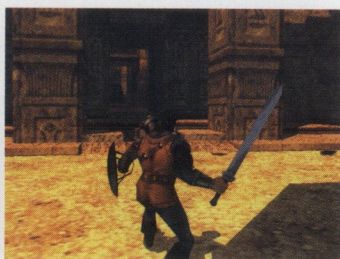


DEMOS CD2



SEVERANCE BLADE OF DARKNESS

Set in a world of heroes and quests, Severance: Blade of Darkness will draw attention due to the graphic violence in its combat scenes. Sword wielding gamers can lop off an opponent's limb and use it as a club to batter the victim into submission as jets of blood pour from the wounds. Its cool, it's gory and we love it. This demo contains one level available in which you play as the Knight,



Sargon. Sargon's mission is to break out of prison and defeat the treacherous Ragnar.

FALLOUT TACTICS MULTIPLAYER DEMO

The multiplayer demo for Fallout Tactics has finally arrived! This demo includes both the singleplayer missions from the previous demo and the multiplayer Skirmish and Assault modes. Grab the demo and join the fun in GameSpy Arcade!

STUNT GP DEMO

Stunt GP is an exhilarating single or multiplayer racing game set in the world of high speed, radio-controlled stunt cars. Accelerate, skid, jump, and burn your way around loops, ramps, corkscrews, spirals, and other obstacles while battling with opponents for victory.

GORKAMORKA DEMO

Grab some Ork mob buddies, scrape

together a few teeth (money) and buy yourself whatever piece of junk you can afford. If you can keep your skin intact and win a few races, you may find yourself racing against the most black hearted, trigger happy savage Orks in Mektown.

CHAMPIONSHIP SURFER

Full 3D surfing experience complete with spray, weather effects, environmental effects, huge swells and more! Australian Surfing Champion Mark Richardson gives this game two thumbs up so it must be good.

SERIOUS SAM PUBLIC TEST #2

Serious Sam is a high-adrenaline arcade-action shooter heavily focused on frantic arcade-style singleplayer action. Sam travels through the beautiful world of ancient Egypt and several diverse planets, confronting countless Mental's minions on his way to the Mental's base.

ONI MOVIE

This is a great Quicktime

movie of some in-game play that is shown in stores as the promotional preview. Watch different sections of the game, fierce battles, and a few cool cutscenes in the fifteen-minute long clip.

GIANTS MOVIE

Giants is the first game to ever pitch the forces of all popular genres in the most frenzied and diverse multiplayer battle ever staged. Have a look at these movies, you'll be impressed.

BLACK & WHITE MOVIE

Eden. The perfect world. A lush, unspoiled paradise of small islands in a cobalt sea. Eight tribes live their lives here in harmony. They work the land, fish the sea, build homes and farm animals. They only want for one thing. A god.

HALO DEMO

Halo takes place on an artificial Ringworld-style planet orbiting a gas giant in another system, much like the vision of Larry Niven's Ringworld universe. This is a preview to keep you entertained until the game is released later this year.



TECH CD2

LVIEW PRO

Attention designers: Looking for a complete imaging tool that gives you increased creative control? Give LView Pro a try. It offers an unlimited number of layered objects, numerous rendering options, and many other professional features.

WINAMP

A favorite among digital audiophiles, this solid MP3 player continues to impress downloaders with its low memory requirements and excellent sound quality.

NETSCAPE 6.0

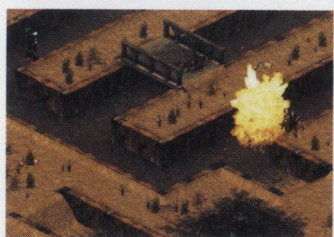
Netscape has finally released the long-awaited update of the tried-and-true Communicator browser suite. Is it any good? We like it...

EASY CD-DA EXTRACTOR

CD-DA Extractor performs digital audio extraction from CDs or DVDs into WAV, RAW, or MP3 format.

ICQ 2000B

ICQ 2000b is the latest release of ICQ, the popular instant-messaging program that lets you communicate with friends and colleagues in real time.





DEMOS CD2 CONTROLS

SEVERANCE BLADE OF DARKNESS

Default Control Keys

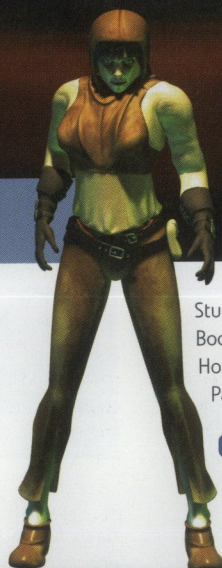
Mouse movement - Look around
Up arrow - Walk forwards
Down arrow - Walk backwards
Left arrow - Turn left
Right arrow - Turn right
Double tap and hold Up arrow - Run forwards
Double tap and hold Down arrow - Run backwards
Shift + Up arrow - Sneak forwards
Left Mouse Button or Right Ctrl - Attack/strike
Right Mouse Button or Forward slash - Jump/climb
Forward slash + Left arrow - Dodge left
Forward slash + Right arrow - Dodge right
Forward slash + Down arrow - Leap back
Alt Gr - Defend/block
Number pad 0 - Lock on to an enemy, then cycle through all attackers
End - Draw or sheath weapons
Return key - pick up, open, use or activate
Page Up - Cycle through inventory weapons
Page down - Cycle through nearby world objects eg. levers, locks, food
Home - Cycle through objects in inventory, eg. keys and potions
Insert - Cycle through inventory shields
Hold Delete + tap Attack - Throw item in right hand
Hold Delete + tap Alt Gr - Drop shield in left hand
Number pad minus - Cycle camera views
Number pad plus - Cycle camera views

FALLOUT TACTICS MULTIPLAYER DEMO

Same as last month

STUNT GP DEMO

Steer Left - Left Key
Steer Right - Right Key
Accelerator - Up Key
Brake - Down Key



Stunt - Shift Key
Boost - CTRL Key
Horn - Return Key
Pause/Menu - ESC Key

CHAMPIONSHIP SURFER

Arrow Keys - Control surfer
Left Ctrl - Stand/Slash
Left Shift - Snap



Z - Launch
Left Alt - Grab Rail
1 - 6 - Camera Presets
Page Up - Next Camera
Page Down - Previous Camera

SERIOUS SAM PUBLIC TEST #2

Move forward - W or Arrow Up
Move backward - S or Arrow Down
Turn left - Arrow Left
Turn right - Arrow Right
Strafe left - Q or A
Strafe right - E or D
Jump/Swim up - Space or R
Dodge/Swim down - F
Fire - Left Mouse Button or Ctrl
Manual reload - Alt (works for colt)
Next/Prev Weapon - [/] or Mouse Wheel Up/Dn
Flip Weapon - \ (Backslash) or Third (Middle) Mouse Button
1 - knife
2 - colt/two colts
3 - single shotgun/double shotgun
4 - minigun/tommygun
5 - rocket launcher

GAMEPLAY CD2

DIRECTX8.0

This latest version of DirectX offers updated graphics, faster frame rates, and support for massively multiplayer games. It also offers more immersive audio when running programs rich in multimedia elements such as full-color graphics, video, 3D animation, and surround sound.

GAMESPY 3D SHAREWARE V2.24

This is the shareware release of the incredibly popular GameSpy 3D. v2.24 is a monster, adding support for eight new games and two new demos, including Baldur's Gate 2, Team Arena and the Serious Same Demo!

DIABLO 2 PATCH V1.5

Blizzard releases this stand alone patch to get you adventurers of Diablo 2 up to version 1.5. Many major and minor bug fixes, great feature additions, and some balance

changes for the Paladin and Amazon round out this needed update.

HOMEWORLD CATACLYSM PATCH V1.0.0.1

This updates Homeworld Catclysm to version 1.0.0.1. Fixes many small glitches with the game.

GIANTS CITIZEN KABUTO V1.1 UPDATE

This program should fix the bug with Giants Citizen Kabuto multiplayer games. If when attempting to join a multiplayer server you get a black screen with the prompt "waiting for host to connect" and nothing else happens, this fix is for you.

ONI EXTRA LEVEL FOR LAST MONTHS DEMO

This patch adds an extra level to Bungie's demo of Oni. The demo was on last month's cover CD, so if you



didn't buy the mag, then you should consider subscribing.

CALL TO POWER 2 UPDATE

Latest Update fixes many small glitches with the game.

DIRT TRACK RACING SPRINT CARS UPDATE V1.01

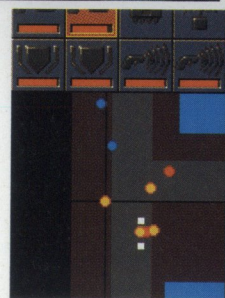
This update fixes various multiplayer crashes and improves multiplayer performance. Also provides better support for force feedback devices.

SYNDICATE BULLFROG 1993



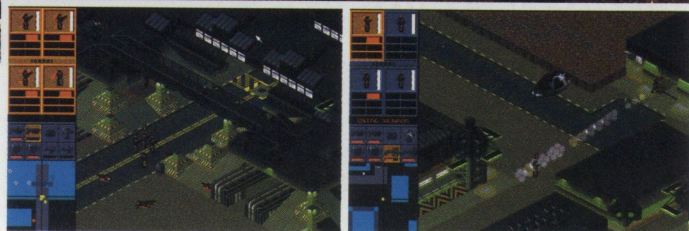
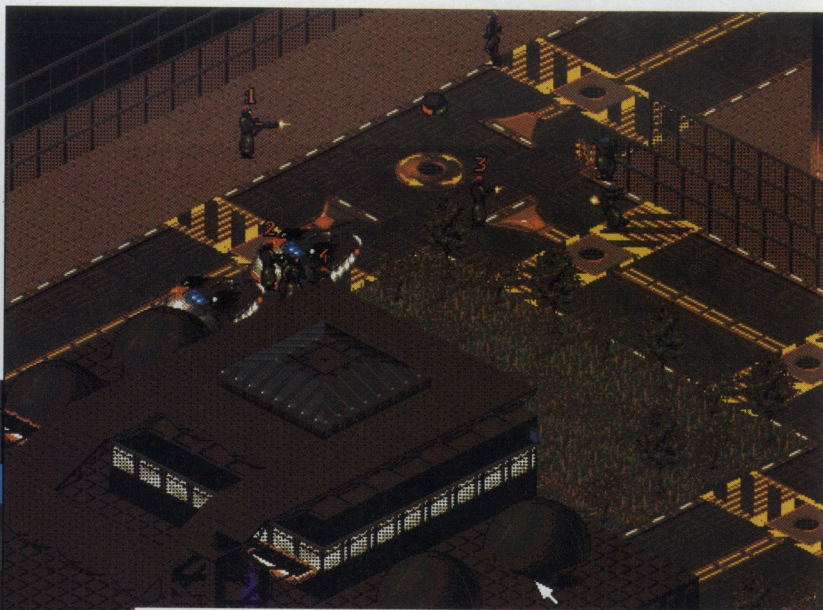
As we all sit like Pavlov's dogs, madly salivating at every minor ding of the Black and White bell which may or may not herald the juicy morsel that may or may not be Molyneux's masterpiece, perhaps we should take time out and have a quick glance to the past. It might even provide an insight into the future...

The term 'revolutionary' is bandied about with an all too irritating abandon in the gaming industry. Yet Bullfrog's 1993 opus, Syndicate, was truly a revolutionary product. The innovative brainchild of Molyneux, Syndicate was a cyberpunk shot in the arm for PC gamers worldwide. The premise was dark and effective: as a member of one of the uber-powerful metacorporations (syndicates) that control the Dystopian world of the future, the player took an armed group of men on a series of isometric romps into the criminal underworld. The



goal? The power of your syndicate. The means? Any available.

In fact, it was precisely this philosophy of 'anything goes' that made Syndicate such a fiendishly playable game. Though most would loathe to admit it, there was simply nothing more enjoyable than accidentally torching a whole crowd of innocent onlookers in the middle of a fire-fight. Of course, the player would then justify this with the big "But they were living in an Orwellian world of dank Capitalist oppression - I did them a favour" spiel. Then, unsurprisingly, more burning would follow.



Syndicate, admittedly, had its flaws. The lack of transparency effects coupled with an isometric, layered viewpoint created problems which were, quite frankly, bloody annoying and the mission structure was rather repetitive. However, these negatives were more than counter-balanced by a host of positives, including the ability to research and

manufacture weapons, a great control system and a highly inventive premise, all combining for a great game experience.

If Syndicate is anything to go by, we are more than justified in drooling over Molyneux's upcoming Black & White. Bring on the future, and bring it on now.

Daniel Staines



REVIEWS

Crusader: No Regret (95%)
KKND (90%) Baku Baku (89%)

THE ARCHIVE

FOUR YEARS AS AUSTRALIA'S AUTHORITY ON PC GAMING

PCPP#7 NOVEMBER 1996

Way back in November '96, before people knew what a 'location specific damage model' was, PCPP jumped into the then-raging tempest of debate that surrounded violence in videogames armed only with a witty headline and an edgy image of a chainsaw smashing a suspiciously fake looking monitor. Maintaining that there was nothing wrong with game violence as long as it remained contextually fantastical, we argued for a stop-gap to be placed on the torrent of more realistically violent situations in gaming in general.

Unfortunately, thanks to games like Raven's Soldier of Fortune, not only was this sound suggestion shot back at us, it was shot back at us and aimed at our location-specific head area which then exploded in a 10,000 pixel shower of blood and gore. Fittingly, Crusader: No Regret, a title that is not noted for its pacifist tendencies, was our lead review for the month and managed to pull a very impressive 95%. Although, more horrifying than all the violence was our feature on the 'interactive movie', Cyberswine. We said it deserved to 'take the world by storm'. We said there was a future in this kind of thing. We were terribly, terribly wrong.

"LucasArts have been very careful about releasing games associated with the Star Wars phenomenon..."
- Us, before LucasArts starting releasing stuff like Star Wars Super Snooker and, worse, Force Commander.

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BARFIGHT!

With the impending release of a number of games using the Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition rules, and with an impending special feature in this very magazine where all the so-called 'real life' staff of PCPP will sit around playing D&D and no doubt pull the piss of it, myself and both my yellow boots feel we should tell you - warn you really - about the Dungeons & Dragons movie, currently screening in all 'good' cinemas.

Typically, this is not a film review column. Yellow Boots is typically about games, and gaming. But the boots must speak. Dungeons & Dragons: The Movie is - and I'm not exaggerating - the biggest threat facing our society today.

Our special viewing of D&D:TM began with myself, the boots and my crazy ex third flatmate noting with some amusement that the guy sitting in front of us was reading a copy of White Dwarf and idly fingering a d20. Other patrons included a little kid clutching a plastic dragon, a fat man with a really scary beard, and a cheeky looking guy who laughed uproariously every time any character in the film said anything at all, even - and especially - hello.

So, the lights went down, the movie started, the cheeky guy got a lot - and I mean a lot - of laughs, and then we got to the barfight. See, there comes a time in every great fantasy when the party of heroes will find themselves in a tavern. Multi-levelled, full of ne'er-do-wells and cutthroats, liberally strewn about with trestle tables, quaffing orcs and sawdust. When a party enters a

tavern, there begins a delicate dance. How long can the heroes maintain their composure before feeling compelled to start a brawl? In D&D:TM it runs to about three minutes. The Dwarf - who, to the cheeky guy's amusement is shorter than only one of the other characters, and doesn't seem to have a name, much less motivation for doing anything at all - suddenly tips over a trestle table.

At this point, two completely unrelated guys in leather jerkins appear in the corner of the shot and start beating the snot out of each other at 2d6 damage for each goober dislodged. It's as if someone just shouted "BARFIGHT!" and the patrons up and rioted.

Among the dust and flailing bodies strides the guy who played the mummy in The Mummy, except that in this film his lips are painted blue. He, like Thora Birch, was able to fool a major studio into thinking he could act; after all, being the mummy in The Mummy just required a bunch of lurching and smouldering and sloughing-off of limbs. It's quite possible that he delivered his evildoing lines with great verve and manic lilt, but we never heard any of his lines because by this stage the cheeky guy in the audience had been gripped by some kind of hysterical fit and was being stretchered out of the cinema by trained professionals.



Add to the barfight a tendency to drag each character through an overlong 'development' scene in which they outline their hopes and fears, and then their other hopes and fears, then the hopes and fears of their pets, some of the worst dragons ever seen in any movie ever, the sickening sight of Jeremy Irons systematically destroying his professional credibility and a little kid sitting just in front of you who, every time the action moves indoors says "Is this a dungeon? Are they in a dungeon? Is there going to be a dragon?", then you will realise Dungeons & Dragons: The Movie is very nearly worse than Battlefield Earth.

As for our special viewing of D&D:TM, well it quickly degenerated when my crazy ex third flatmate shouted "BARFIGHT!" and the cinema patronage ripped up the Johnson Recliners and started beating each other for 2d8 damage per turn until dead, especially the little kid who was so keen to know if the film had actually got to any dungeons or dragons yet. But I recommend the film. I give it four out of five tankards of ale.

Barfight!



NEXT MONTH...

• IT'S OUR BIRTHDAY!

Join us as we celebrate five years of PC gaming in our triumphant, bloody-hell-how-did-we-last-this-long, 60th issue! Relive the highs, the lows, the even lowers, and the lower still, all in one enormous feature that demonstrates the history of PC PowerPlay is the history of PC games...

• OPTICAL DRIVES POWERTEST

Whether you're playing games, listening to music, watching movies or burning discs, the quality of your drive is hugely important to the performance. In May, we'll tell you the best CD, DVD and CDRW drives on the market...

• REVIEWS!

Tribes 2 - No, really, this time! Maybe...
Black & White - We promise...

PC POWERPLAY #60 - ON SALE APRIL 4, 2001



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